

BEADLE'S

Dime New York Library

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Vol. II.

Published Every
Two Weeks.

Beadle & Adams, Publishers,
98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Ten Cents a Copy.
\$2.50 a Year.

No. 17

Nightshade; The Robber Prince of Hounslow Heath.

BY DR. J. H. ROBINSON.

CHAPTER I.

THE WHITE AND BLACK MASK.

A COACH, drawn by six horses, went surging and creaking across Hounslow Heath, on the great Western Road to London. The traveling was bad—the cumbersome wheels moving with difficulty through a paste of black mud. Locomotion, in the reign of Charles the Second, was a matter of time, patience, and equine strength—all the highways of England being in execra-

There were three persons in the carriage—Lady Castlemaine, Mrs. Haselrigge, and Sir Henry Bennet, Secretary of State. To the student of history, these names will at once suggest a volume of reminiscences, their lives being intimately associated with a romantic and interesting epoch.

The first faint and shadowy haze of twilight was descending softly on the heath. The hour and the road were both suggestive of the dangers of the period; and the conversation of the parties in the coach naturally fell upon foot-pads, cutpurses, and highwaymen. As is usually the case, in such situations, with those who wish their courage to stand high in the estimation of fair ladies, Sir Henry professed himself quite at ease, laughed at the tales recited to him by his gentle companions, and protested that nothing would better accord with his present humor

more consequence, two pistols of the large calibre and size of those carried by horsemen in holsters at that day. The sight of those weapons had an effect on Sir Henry wonderfully tranquilizing; he stared at them in dull inaction, forgetful, apparently, that he was a moment since specially anxious for an interruption of this kind.

"Alms! alms! For the sake of Our Lady, alms!"

The voice of the applicant was bland and courteous.

Mrs. Haselrigge began to recover courage. She fixed her handsome eyes on the bold mendicant. The increasing twilight prevented her taking particular note of his apparel; but that he was of goodly stature and of a shapely person, she was at once assured. Her inquisitive gaze naturally sought his face, but his hight



THE ROBBER PRINCE.

ble condition. Ruggedness and quagmires were not the only inconveniences of the road: robberies were frequent, and of an aggravating character. Contributions were levied on both simple and gentle, with an imperativeness that admitted of no hesitation or compromise. These outrages upon justice and individual rights were sometimes perpetrated under circumstances so singular, that they set the whole country agape with wonder and admiration. There was a mania for cutting purses and clapping pistols at people's heads.

The postillion whipped and cursed; the coachman whipped and cursed; the footman shouted and cursed; while the poor beasts tugged dutifully at their task. The vehicle was one of new invention, called the flying-coach; but never was the figure of flying more unfortunately applied.

than an adventure with the most audacious infester of the roads. Being well armed, he declared it would be the best sport in the world to shoot two or three of the rogues, and put the rest to flight with his sword.

The coach stopped; the postillion, coachman, and footman became suddenly silent; the horses ceased to tug and strain, while the heavy top no longer rocked from side to side. There was a fluttering within. Expectation was rife. Sir Henry sneezed, and the ladies looked at him with eager, inquiring faces. During the few seconds of suspense that followed, not a word was spoken. Anon the clumsy door was opened without haste, carefully, deliberately. The ladies shrieked; Sir Henry grew a trifle pale about the mouth, and sat motionless on his seat. They saw a tall, dark figure, and what was of far

raised it above the low door. Of this deprivation, however, she had not long reason to complain, for he immediately stooped, and brought his head on a level with her own. Instead of seeing the threatening visage of a highwayman, she beheld a black and white mask—black on one side, from the forehead to the chin, white on the other."

Lady Castlemaine could not refrain from expressing her terror by trembling and wringing her hands. She had heard of the robber of the black and white mask, and his startling appearance seemed to her active imagination the harbinger of all that was dreadful.

"You give yourself unnecessary trouble," added the intruder, in a tone a shade less courtly. "Your ladyship's life is in no immediate danger. You would gain time and

deport much more sensibly by searching your person for the alms for which I humbly sue, than by these silly perturbations and attitudes of despair."

"Who are you," demanded Sir Henry, faintly, "that dare make these bold requests? Know you not that we belong to the king's household?"

"In answer to the first, Sir Henry, I would say that I am he of the WHITE AND BLACK. To the second, I reply, that I know you well; and it gives me the liveliest pleasure to meet you in this solitary place. Speak not of the king's household. Were you Charles himself, you should not pass over this moor without paying ing tribute."

He carelessly turned the muzzle of one of his pistols toward Sir Henry, whose fears were gradually subsiding.

"I have little leisure and less disposition," added the mask, "to protract a scene like this. Deliver, and at once, the four hundred pounds which you to-day collected for the king, together with certain letters which you ingeniously intercepted, and in consideration of your high office, you may keep that valuable diamond that I see sparkling on your finger. It shall never be said that he of the Black and White was not generous."

"Where are my rogues?" groaned Sir Henry. "By my soul! I believe the three varlets are in league with this rascal!"

"Pardon me, my lord!" answered the robber, most politely. "About three minutes ago, I saw your postillion, coachman, and footman, running across the heath at a very good pace."

"I'll have 'em hanged!" muttered Sir Henry, reluctantly drawing a bag from beneath the cushions, and handing it to the mask, who accepted the gift by a graceful inclination of the body.

"The letters!" said the resolute beggar, in a firm voice.

"Nay, most obliging sir," stammered his lordship, "you must be misinformed respecting the letters."

"If you have ever had the happiness to hear of him of the Black and White," said the mask, in a low, imperious tone, "you must be aware that he never holds long conversations with his benefactors. My lord, if you value life, surrender those letters on the instant!"

"Sir Henry," cried Mrs. Haselrigge, "I implore you to consider your safety!"

With a murmured imprecation, the secretary drew a small package from his doublet, and gave it with trembling hand to the robber, who placed it in his bosom with more haste than he had yet displayed.

"Thanks, Sir Secretary! I shall long remember your goodness."

He turned to Lady Castlemaine and Mrs. Haselrigge.

"Fair ladies, if your contributions be equal to your charms, I shall be more than satisfied."

He extended a gloved hand, and they placed in it their purses, which, unfortunately for the despoiler, were not heavily freighted.

"You have a small picture of the king, in a diamond setting," said he of the Black and White, addressing Lady Castlemaine.

"The diamonds are small," stammered the lady.

"You can better spare them than if they were larger. Your loss will be less for their smallness," returned the mask.

With a sigh of regret, she drew the miniature from its warm resting-place, and surrendered it to the polite but pitiless alms-taker.

"Gentle ladies," he said, "I might drive a harder bargain with you, but I have respect to your sex, as well as for charms which have power to dazzle the eyes of Charles Stuart, of England, and the Duke of Monmouth." When he mentioned the name of Monmouth, he bowed to Mrs. Haselrigge.

"Courteous robber, of the White and Black," said the latter, "I trust you will not leave us without a name by which we may sometimes recall the memory of the hero of this adventure?"

"Fair madam," replied the mask, in a voice peculiarly insinuating, "I will leave, as my parting gift, the name of NIGHTSHADE." He stood silent a moment, then bowing profoundly, added: "Nightshade, of the White and Black."

He closed the door of the coach, and a moment later they heard him calling in a loud voice to the postillion and coachman to drive Sir Henry Bennet to London. Calling them cowardly and loitering rogues, he mounted a large white horse that had stood quietly beside him during the robbery, and galloped away. The trained animal stood an instant on its hinder legs, on feeling its master's weight in the saddle, then launched on its course, making the earth shake with its heavy bounds.

The secretary, who had by this time laid hands on a pistol, fired it after the receding highwayman, with no other effect than to shiver a pane of glass and frighten the horses, which, left to themselves, fell to rearing and plunging in an alarming manner. They dragged the ponderous vehicle a short distance with dangerous speed, when it was overturned, and stuck fast in the mud. The horses leaped and strained at the dead, unwieldy weight, but, fortunately for those imprisoned in the coach, could not start it. Here was a dilemma not only embarrassing but critical. There was no way of escape from the vehicle. The secretary found himself half-stifled under a pile of cushions, while his cries for assistance were so hearty and persistent, that the ladies, though greatly disturbed and in a most uncomfortable position, could scarcely forbear laughing. Matters were serious enough; the terrified animals kicking and floundering, the coach quivering and groaning in every joint, and the utter hopelessness of extrication, rendered the accident one of a trying and fearful nature.

It was in vain that Sir Henry tried to get upon his feet and groped for the fastenings of the door; he could neither get out by his own exertions, nor bring back his attendants by his shouts. He seriously thought that his final hour had arrived, and the ladies were commanding themselves to saintly protection, when most welcome sounds reached their ears. They heard the clatter of horses' feet, and before five minutes had elapsed, were surrounded by men on horseback. An authoritative voice gave hurried orders. The coach was instantly seized and righted. The frantic horses were held by strong hands, while the vehicle was drawn forward to safer ground.

"This is as it should be," added he who had directed these movements. "Three or four of you ride after those craven rascals who have shamefully deserted their trust."

The secretary tried to look out to see who were his deliverers, but the glass was so covered with mud, that he could discover but indistinct figures moving about or standing at rest.

"Who is it that gives these orders?" asked Mrs. Haselrigge, whose curiosity was much awakened. "Is there not something familiar in his voice, Sir Henry?"

"No!" answered the secretary, who was now in a most unamiable temper. "I notice nothing peculiar in it. It is some honest burgher, I dare say, returning to his shop and his wares; or a drover, perchance, with a company of his fellows. If we get out of this hobble in safety, I shall care little to whom we owe the favor."

Presently the horsemen came back with the runaways, who had secreted themselves behind a hedge. The postillion was placed on his horse, the coachman on his box, the footman on his board, with more precipitation than ceremony. This operation was superintended by a stout fellow, who, so far as those in the coach could judge, had great satisfaction in the employment, giving each a shake and a parting admonition as he adjusted him in his appropriate position.

"This adwice hear!" he said, in conclusion. "Never drop whip and rein when a honest gentleman of the road finds it convenient to stop the vehicle and speak a word to your betters. Listen, ye warmints! Give ear, likewise! Observe, also! Did ye ever know a wulgar postillion to be robbed, or a coachman, moreover, or a footman, notwithstanding? Adwance, ye willains!"

"What did I tell you?" grumbled the secretary. "A company of drovers!"

"Sir Henry," said a voice at the broken pane, "be more discreet with your fire-arms. I take it ill of you, upon my word, that you should expose these fair ladies to such peril. Had anything unfortunate happened to Lady

Castlemaine, the king would not only have degraded you from your high office, but cast you into the lowest dungeon of the tower. And as for Lady Haselrigge, it is reported that his grace, the Duke of Monmouth, has an interest in her, being bewitched by her exceeding beauty."

"It is *Nightshade!*!" murmured Mrs. Haselrigge, in a singular flutter of doubt and apprehension.

"A matchless medley of courtesy and impiudence!" muttered the secretary.

"Be careful of yourself, Sir Henry, and give my dutiful services to the king. Till we meet again, farewell!"

Lady Castlemaine, looking through the shivered pane, saw him of the Black and White bend in the saddle till his hair mingled with his horse's mane, and ride away at an easy canter. In a moment they were alone on the heath. The whips cracked, the horses tugged, and the wheels rolled slowly over the ground.

"The pink of gallantry!" sighed Mrs. Haselrigge.

"Pardon me, madam," answered Sir Henry, biting his lips, "if I choose to regard him as the most mendacious of knaves. I hope I shall live to see him adorn Tyburn tree! This *Nightshade* of the Black and White is the identical fellow who has given so much trouble to the authorities. His robberies have been of a bold and startling character. He is very much talked of at London. The mystery of his movements, and the manner in which he baffles pursuit, are themes on which all the gossips of the country are eloquent. Faith! it wouldn't be strange if the king and half his court were to take to the highway in quest of adventures. The secret of his power is unknown; but some of his robberies point to a higher game than paltry pounds, shillings, and pence. He has this night rifled me of a correspondence that I would not have parted with for the whole county of Middlesex."

"His hand was small and shapely," observed Lady Castlemaine, whose admiration of *Nightshade* was perceptibly heightened by the remarks of Sir Henry.

"Bah!" sneered the latter. "I have no patience with such sickly sentiment. Lose what I have lost, and you'll think more of his neck than his hand."

The evening was considerably advanced, but the moon lent a soft and misty light to guide the travelers on their way. The coach labored onward. The road was now much better, although the wheels still sank in the yielding soil. They were making good progress, when they were again made anxious by a sudden interruption of motion. Possibilities of another call for alms excited their imaginations.

"What now?" roared Sir Henry. "Are we to be robbed again?"

The footman leaped from his place, and opened the door.

"A curious sight, your lordship! Will your lordship and the ladies please to look?"

The parties turned their eyes to the point indicated, and saw a horse approaching at a brisk pace, ridden in a most novel fashion. The rider was a man advanced in life, seated with his face to the animal's tail, his legs tied beneath its flanks, and his arms pinioned behind him. His hat and wig were gone, and the few long, gray hairs that remained on his head, floated in the wind. The motions of his beast, which was a spirited one, together with his own exertions to free himself, swayed and tossed him about in a grotesque manner. Sir Henry and the ladies fell to laughing, while the footman stopped the horse.

"I know the old curmudgeon," said the secretary. "It is Got Moneypenny, the miser; the most penurious wretch in the kingdom."

"For the love of God," groaned the old man, with dismal contortions, "pursue the villain and recover my bag of gold!"

"Better untie you, I think," replied Sir Henry, much amused.

"Yes, it would be well to untie me. Oh, my gold! my gold! I have come to poverty in my old age. I shall die in Bridewell."

The miser's grimaces and lamentations were irresistibly ludicrous. The postillion and coachman joined in the general merriment.

"Cease your bawling!" cried Sir Henry. "I will wager a hundred pounds that you have more money in your strong-box than the king has in his treasury."

"Heaven reward those that laugh at my calamity, and mock when my fear cometh!" repiped Moneypenny. "Will no one have pity? Will no one mount and pursue? He wore a black and white mask, rides a white horse, and said he would sleep in London to-night. If I were the king, or the lord mayor, I would purge Middlesex of such vermin, I'll warrant. My gold—my precious yellow gold! I'll give two pounds to any one who'll bring back my gold."

"Such liberality will ruin you!" laughed Sir Henry. "Man, man, one pound is enough for the restoration of fifty."

No one had made a movement to untie the unhappy Moneypenny, who, in the loss of his treasure, was well-nigh unconscious of his uncomfortable and ridiculous situation.

"If they had wounded me," he went on, "if they had left me with a broken head, or a broken limb, or a crushed rib, I should have been content. But fifty, fifty pounds—fifty pounds in yellow ore! Full weight down weight! Will nobody ride? I care not for your mockings and your mirth, if ye'll but ride and restore me my own."

This scene took place nearly opposite an inn; and while the miser was making his complaint and pouring out his misery, a half-dozen court gallants rode from the door to the spot. To these gay and light-hearted gentlemen, Got Moneypenny soon made known his grievance; while Sir Henry, in fewer words, related his own mishaps. These hilarious lords were in mood and condition to attempt the capture of a character so famous and successful as Nightshade, of the Black and White. After a volley of gibes and jests at the miser, they put spurs to their steeds, and galloped off on the road to London.

As luck would have it, they had not ridden over half a mile, when they descried, about twenty rods in advance, a man riding a white horse, who allowed them to lessen the distance at least one-half, before giving indication that he was aware of pursuit; then, turning an instant in his saddle, as if to scan the speed and strength of those behind, set off at a rate calculated to test the best horse-flesh in England. The white steed, flying across the heath through the shimmering moonlight, looked like a shooting-star. It flew on, and on, till it was a mere speck of silver on the plain, then vanished like the evanescent gleam of a fire-fly.

The pursuers, now scattered along the road, swept forward with unabated ardor. Their animals, which were of choice breeds and tried mettle, put their willing muscles to the work, and devoured the ground with tremendous bounds. The foremost of the pursuers were confident Nightshade could not escape, although their assurance received a severe shock when he disappeared in the distant dimness.

Presently they met a man driving a pack-mule.

"Have you seen a man on a white horse, my good fellow?" asked the leading gallant, slackening his speed.

"No, your honor," replied the countryman, "but there be a man on a great red horse, just ayont here."

"Was he going fast?"

"He be goin', your worship, as if the devil be at his heels!"

The interrogator resumed his headlong course. The countryman gazed after him and his hurrying companions, muttering:

"When ye take the flying highwayman, ye'll do better than ye ha'se done yet."

The pursuers swept over two miles of level road with the speed of the wind. Those in advance at the start were now in the rear, urging their steaming beasts with spur and voice. It was a helter-skelter race; boisterous, yet earnest; noisy, yet persistent; disorderly, yet dangerous. People ran from every way-side inn to see them swoop by, some sending after them words of encouragement, others laughter and jeers.

A cavalier, mounted on a strong iron-gray, now led by a considerable distance the reckless riders. This gray proved swift of foot, agile of limb, and of great endurance. Its noble and generous blood was heated, and it ran with an eagerness scarcely equaled by its fearless rider. They had reached a more uneven tract of country. On turning an abrupt winding of the road, the man on the gray caught sight of the chase. But he held him in view a moment only, though long enough

to perceive that he was mounted on a powerful red horse. It was in vain that he pricked and cheered; he could not obtain a second view of the robber of the White and Black. Leaning low in his saddle, he pushed forward with unabated vigor. Within a mile of London, he overtook a man on foot.

"Has a man passed you, riding a red horse?"

"No, your lordship; but a fellow dashed by me, not five minutes ago, on a mighty black."

The pursuer sped on. The pedestrian shook his fist after him, and muttered:

"Peradventure you will; peradventure you won't."

"A white, a red, and a black!" said he on the iron-gray to himself. "I wonder what next?"

Huts, hamlets, and inns, went rushing past him. The earth seemed to revolve with astonishing velocity beneath the hoofs of his noble steed. He was entering London, when, for the third time, he espied the object of his frantic haste. Nightshade no longer seemed in a hurry; he turned in his saddle, made a gesture of adieu to his pursuers, and then his great horse shot forward, over London Bridge with a fleetness that was wonderful; and, a moment after, disappeared mysteriously near the Tower.

CHAPTER II.

THE BARLEY MOW.

During the reign of Charles the Second, Bartemas Gurther kept the Inn of the Barley Mow, at Hounslow Heath, ten miles from London.

The hostel of the Barley Mow was known far and near for the foam of its ale, the flavor of its sack, the abundance of its cheer, and, in brief, for the comforts it afforded to hungry man and jaded beast.

On a foggy afternoon, in the tap-room of this inn, sat two men, over two bottles of sack, smoking two pipes. One of these persons had long legs, long arms, a long neck, a long nose, long hair, and was called Kyte Linkhorn. He was lean and lathy, as if he had been flattened between two rollers, and came out very meek and subdued. He was a journeyman watchmaker, from the Three Dials, Clerkenwell, London.

His companion had short legs, short arms, a short neck, a short nose, short hair, and was short of clothes. His name was Lack Billson. He was stout and stumpy, and seemed to have been thickened in a fulling-mill, coming out very red, jolly, and bristling.

These men had met by accident—if accidents ever happen in this mutable world—and were putting out their mental feelers to get hold of each other.

"My father," said Mr. Billson, in answer to a corkscrew question, "was a wagrant, and my mother was a wagrant; and I," he added, tapping his breast, "am likewise a wagrant. It's a sing'lar development; for my ancestors, a hundred year back'ards, was dooks, every one of 'em."

"The movements got out o' order, I suppose?" said Mr. Linkhorn, suggestively, speaking after the manner of his trade.

"They did git out o' order," answered Lack Billson, impressively. "Good many on 'em was convicted o' high treason, and their 'eads cotched in a basket at the Tower. It's werry awful to have your 'ead cotched in a basket!"

Mr. Billson puffed out both cheeks till his squat nose was nearly lost in them.

"It's aggravatin'!" observed Linkhorn.

"I rejoiced with wiwacitie w'en the greatness run out and the wagruncy run in. It's better to be a wagrant than a king; for a king has to set on a throne, and a wagrant can set anywhere he pleases."

Mr. Billson made good this assertion, by a graceful and appropriate swing of the right hand.

"You don't git me a settin' on a throne," he went on. "Not as you knows on! Not as I knows on, neither! Not as anybody knows on, also! Look at the contrary of it. Look at wagrants, which own all they surveys. The gold and silver is their'n, providin' they can lay violent 'ands on it. The cattle on the 'ills likewise. The eatables and the drinkables nevertheless. The clothes on the lines a 'anging for to dry, notwithstanding."

Kyte Linkhorn put a vast pressure on his mind in order to grasp the subject in its fullness.

Lack Billson floated on in the current of his eloquence.

"He isn't shet up in one place, your wagrant isn't. He owns Lunnon, and Middlesex, and Surrey, and Kent; in short, the whole o' England. Wot a opportunity to sleep! He can flop anywhere, and sleep as on a welvet couch. He sleeps to home, with his own ruff and his own floor atop and aneath. W'en he gits up, his wittles is ready; he has only the vexation o' choosin' from sich a variety."

"I almost wish I was a wagrant," said Linkhorn, regretfully.

"I weeps with ye," said Billson, with pathos; "but tears isn't of no avail. You seems a likely lad, how'sever, and it's better late nor never. Begin with a board—sleep on a board, at fust; or in the inconveniences of a board, curl up on a broken door, or in a dog-kennel vacated by reason o' vermin."

Mr. Billson took a sip from his mug, and repeated, with a gentle swoop of his dirty but eloquent hand:

"Vacated by reason o' vermin. W'en more advanced, you can drop w'rever you is, without regard to wot's under. Who kears for wot's under? Isn't it a wile prejudice? Wot's the developments o' science? It's that the vital elements is dust and dirt. Kings and wagrants, dooks and watchmakers, must go back to the same."

"I should think sleeping on a board, or in a kennel, or the filth of the street, might be uncomfortable," Linkhorn remarked.

"Is it more uncomfortable than settin' on a throne, and havin' your 'ead cotched in a basket?" asked Mr. Billson, in a tone of mild reproof.

"There's the rain and the snow!" said Linkhorn.

"Crawl in!" answered Billson, demolishing the argument with two words. "Crawl in! W'en it snows, your true wagrant crawl in. As for rain, let rain be damned!"

Lack Billson puffed out his cheeks and lost his nose again. Linkhorn allowed that it was reasonable for the rain to be damned.

"I'm not satisfied on the subject of wittles," he observed, running his lank fingers through his long hair meditatively.

"Wittles!" cried Mr. Billson, contemptuously. "Will you let wittles stan' in the way of advancement? Look at me, watchmaker, while I convinces ye. Do you see a want o' wittles? Isn't here marrer and fatness, bone and muskle? Listen while I convicts your judgment. Put your mind on the pots and kittles, fryin'-pans and ovens of Lunnon. Ave you got it there?"

"There or thereabouts," answered Kyte.

"Werry good! Wot is them pots and kittles, them fryin'-pans and ovens for? To bibe and to stew, to fry and to bake in, a'n't they? Werry good ag'in. Them is wittles, isn't they? Wot'll you do? Foller the laws o' hunger. Don't the rats in the sewers foller the laws o' hunger, and take wot they can git? Isn't a wagrant better nor a rat?"

"You're a jolly 'un!" exclaimed Kyte, full of admiration.

"You shall be a jolly 'un, too, if you likes!" cried Billson, patronizingly. "You begins to see wot a wagrant is, and wot kings is as has their 'eads cotched in baskets. Don't be lean and hungry no longer. Don't waste your vigor over the tickers. Carry your tools to the swagman, and spend your money in convivial mugs with him as advises ye."

Lack Billson swallowed the dregs of his sack and arose.

"I must be a toddlin', my man. I'll see ye at Lunnon. You're welcome to wot I've advanced. Rise above adversity. Beware o' the vultures and wampyres o' the law. Pay the reck'nin'. Eat more wittles, and may eaven add its blessin'!"

Lack Billson inflated his face to the loss of his nose, quivered his chubby hands over Linkhorn's cogitative head, then walked briskly from the Barley Mow, as jolly a vagrant as ever was. Possibly the entrance of Bartemas Gurther, who had a strong dislike to his class, hastened his departure. The worthy innkeeper had a goodly bulk of body, a ruby face, a loud voice, a strong will, a helpful helpmate, and a pretty daughter—whose name was Margaret—a saucy-lipped, black-eyed, black-haired girl, whom a man could be forgiven for loving. Many ancient bottles were called for at the Barley Mow, in the secret hope that they would be brought

by the fair hands of the innkeeper's daughter.

There came in with Gurther a young man, to whom he was addressing some animated remarks.

"Got to be robbed, haven't we? Can't step out doors, can we, without seeing pistols, arquebusses, and daggers! Our purses must be inquired for every day by this fellow who rides a red horse, a black horse, and a white horse, and is everywhere at the same time."

Gurther threw himself upon a wooden settle, and took breath.

"I ask you, Christy Kirk, what's to come of all this?"

"I suppose the king will put a stop to it," answered Christy, modestly.

"Then why don't he put a stop to it?" insisted the inn-keeper, with considerable heat. "If a man can't keep what he's got," he added, "what's the use of settlin' down and tryin' to cumulate? I put that question to you, Christy Kirk, and to you, Kyte Linkhorn; and I'd put it to Charles himself, if he was here."

"And very properly, too," said Christy, who, having been wounded by the bright eyes of Margaret, was naturally desirous to stand high in the estimation of her father.

"If a man," continued Gurther, in the same convincing strain of argument, "can't settle down and 'cumulate, he becomes a rollin' stone and gathers no moss; which is anonymous to *not* settlin' down and *not* cumulatin'."

"That's wot I calls a clincher!" said Kyte Linkhorn. "Master Mallers would call that a clincher, too."

"To settle down," pursued Gurther, "is the main business o' life. Arter that comes the gatherin' in of the wherewithal to make you comfortable agin a rainy day, as well as to give your darter (pervidin' you have a darter) a lift when she gets ready to settle down and 'cumulate."

Christy Kirk blushed at this allusion, for he hoped to be the happy one to "settle down" with Margaret Gurther.

"I wish there was more here," said Linkhorn. "I likes argyment, 'specially when things comes on, one arter the other, as though they was framed in from the beginnin' by a mind as could see clear through."

The innkeeper acknowledged this tribute to his perspicacity with a slight winking and blinking of the eyes, but without permitting himself to be diverted from the question of "settlin' down."

"If I was to advise a young person, I'd say: 'Become stationary. Don't wander; don't be a rollin' stone. I have a rollin' stone in my eye.'"

Kyte Linkhorn looked up as if he expected to see him take it out of his eye.

"The rollin' stone I have in my eye is, Moll Pool!"

"Life of my body!" muttered Linkhorn.

"She which I alludes to," added Gurther, "is a baggage as unsexes herself and flouts about the country a horseback and afoot; here to-day, at Lunnon to-morrow, in the clothes invented for masculine wear. As for the matter o' character, I shan't care to look arter the same. That she easionally cuts a purse, I wouldn't, for a certainty herein set forth."

"Ain't she a honest 'un?" asked Kyte.

"How should I know whether she's a honest 'un? Be I a man to find out whether women is honest 'uns. Ha'n't I enough to do to keep a honest inn without troublin' myself about the honesty of females? But to return to the argyment: It would be an advantage to the public morals if this she, in doublet and hose, was sent to Bridewell."

Bartemas Gurther stopped with an abruptness that indicated the sudden presence of an obstruction. The door was pushed open, and the figure that presented, afforded an explanation of the stoppage of his discourse. He grew a trifle redder in the face, and it was not without a slight quackling in the throat that he said:

"Enter, Mary Glasspool! This hostel is for the entertainment of such as comes."

"Roguel! It is barely two seconds since you sent me to Bridewell! What a mighty difference between presence and absence!" said the intruder, advancing into the middle of the room.

"Truly, Mistress Moll," replied the inn-keeper, producing a handkerchief a trifle redder than his face, and blowing his nose like a fish-horn, "we sometimes give the tongue

license in the absence of friends, without meanin' 'em a injury. I can't make the old proverb lie for anybody. Listeners is them that never has and never will hear any goad of theirselves. Under that give notice."

"You beer-bloat! You sack-sponge!" retorted Moll, shaking a little riding-whip warningly at Gurther.

"Wot a female development! Wot a roaring girl!" exclaimed the watchmaker, with dilated eyes.

The unique personage answering to the name of Moll Pool, turned and gave Linkhorn a playful cut across the shoulders.

"Wot a stunnin' movement she's got! There's a main spring for ye! And there's a dial, too, that beats some I've set agoin'."

Mary Glasspool was a prodigy of womankind. She did not always wear the prescribed attire of her sex, but by a bold raid on established usage, now and then in erratic moods, crept into doublet and hose. The doublet of silver tissue swept down to the waist, with sleeves reaching a little below the elbow, after the style of the period, the remainder of the arm being covered with the white linen shirt-sleeve, puffed, and ending in ruffles at the wrist. Over her shoulders she wore, with dashing grace, a short blue-velvet cloak trimmed with gold lace. Her cap was of blue plush, with a long feather drooping low from the left side. The trunk-hose were of the same material as the cloak, puffed at the knees like bladders. The stockings were of silk; the boots short, with broad tops of russet leather. Her periwig was in the prevailing mode, and fell in banks of curls over her back and shoulders. To complete her costume, a saucy sword dangled at her side, supported by a rich belt. With her ruffs and puffs, her gold and feathers, boots and spurs, periuke and sword, Moll Pool made a very notable figure.

To these particulars must be added: an unabashed and piquant countenance; a quick and shrewd pair of eyes; a voice round, clear, and resonant; a tongue that could readily whip up every word of the English language, and a wit to send them sharply home like arrows; together with an easy, fashionable, dare-to deportment that made her at home in all places, and a figure so large and well-developed that he would have a high opinion of his own strength who dared provoke her ire. To sum up, she looked and acted the gay and slashing gallant, wanting neither the impudence nor ability of that character. It would be injustice to this unsexed maiden not to admit that she had more than an average claim to personal comeliness—her teeth being white as a bank of snow, her lips aglow with health, and her expression not only vivacious but dangerously coquettish when the winning mood was on her.

"Mistress Glasspool," said Gurther, "I have been discoursin' of rollin' stones and the king's highway; which isn't safe for them as carries walables. The man as rides the three horses of three different colors, is up and at his business, bringin' many to grief by reason of the same. Take notice of which. People have been robbed in Lunnon within the hearin' of Bow-Bells, without the privilege o' sayin', 'Wherfor?' At Lincoln's Inn Fields, ditto. At Charing Cross, ditto. At other places, ditto."

"Sweet-spoken Bartemas," answered Moll, "I ave nothing to complain of. I am none the poorer for him of the White and Black."

"Them that go light, light return."

"Prate not of lightness," said Glasspool. "Talk of provender, cups, and outlets. Keep within your vein, my master." She minced to and fro, lashing her russet boots with her switch.

CHAPTER III. THE TWO MAIDENS — THE CAVALIERS — THE ROBBERY.

The soft ring of girls' laughter was heard. Two young persons, with their arms thrown about each other, showed their pretty figures at the door. One of these damsels was Margaret Gurther, the other her cousin Ruby, daughter of Primus Mallows, watchmaker, of the parish of Clerkenwell, London. Ruby, attended by Kyte Linkhorn, had trotted down to Hounslow on a flying visit, as she was in the habit of doing half-a-dozen times a year. She was of the same age as Margaret, a trifle taller, and gifted with that inheritance so perilous to woman—beauty. Had she been more meanly endowed by cunning Nature, she

would have had fewer occasions to blush at the bold glances of incontinent eyes and the insolence of court gallants.

Ruby and Margaret, standing with unstudied grace in the door, formed a charming picture. Christy Kirk thought he had never seen a sight so pretty. Seeing her thus yoked with her fair cousin, gave him, he knew not why, an additional pleasure. Had not the curiosity of the maidens been awakened by such a nine-days' wonder as Mary Glasspool, they would not have been true to the instincts of Mother Eve.

"Look at me, my pretty dears!" cried Moll, throwing out her arms, and whirling slowly on the pivot of her right heel. "I was made to be looked at. Take your fill, my ducks!"

"At your wild, unwomanly pranks again, Mary Glasspool," said Ruby, smiling, in spite of her wish to be grave.

"Had you ever a gallant, my blushing maid?" answered Moll, pinching the girl's cheeks. "I'll warrant you were never wooed half so fine as I can woo you in my doublet and hose; for, look you, daughter of the watchmaker, not one of the he-rogues is half so handsome as I. They are coarse—those he-rogues are coarse, with beards frightfully rough. Mark this chin, my Ruby; it is smoother than your white hand, and softer than a cat's back. Observe this royal carriage; this mellow langnishment of the voice; this wicked cast of the eyes; this—"

Mary Glasspool ceased her mimeries as abruptly as Gurther had bridled his tongue a few moments before. The girls, looking behind them, beheld, to their confusion, two gentlemen, who had entered the wide hall of the hostel unheard, and unobserved. The taller of the two was dressed in cloth of black velvet, with high top-boots, a black beaver, with a flaxen periuke nearly covering his brows as well as a portion of his side-face. His complexion was noticeably sallow; while a singular scar on the left cheek, gave an expression to his countenance that one could not easily forget. His eyes were bold and searching, his manner assured, though neither rude nor pretentious.

His companion was clad in gray, even to the cap and feather; while his features were as fair as the other's were sallow. His attention was continually fixed on him of the scar, to whom he manifestly paid a mute deference. Both wore the heavy swords of the period.

The instant the gaze of the cavalier in black rested on the face of Ruby, the gravity which his features had worn in repose, gave place to surprise and pleasure. The quick gleam that swept over his visage, half dispelled its sallowness.

"Come!" said Ruby, gently drawing her cousin from the room. "We are in the way of your father's guests."

"In the way? By the sceptre of the king, no! The stars of heaven are as much in the way of the traveler, of a dark night!" exclaimed the cavalier in black.

Christy Kirk started to his feet, and looked menacingly at the smiling and bowing gallant, who, while the maidens stood irresolute, placed himself before them, cutting off their retreat.

"Mine host," he added, with a gesture the most *debonair*, "let not these damsels defraud us of their fair company. Faith! it is a welcome sight to see such faces on this accursed heath, and the sin lies in hiding them in the dingy nooks and crannies of a rural inn."

"You of the Barley Mow," interposed he in gray, "we would fain try the flavor of your most ancient vintage; and, prithee, let it be served by these dainty maidens."

"One of these," answered Gurther, with visible pride, "is my darter Margaret, the other, my niece Ruby; and therefore, your honors, maidens of simple degree, though, I thank God, as virtuous and modest girls as any in the land."

"I doubt it not, worthy host," replied he of the scar.

"Your worships are welcome to the Barley Mow; and you shall have the wine, and my Meg shall serve it, if it be your pleasures."

"Thanks, obliging Gurther! And if I have not heard your inn praised more than once, may I be as unhappy as the king at Whitehall! Use no ceremony with us. We are but soldiers of fortune, and servants of Charles, though our worldly means are perhaps above our deservings. As we shall sometimes travel this road, and spend our money at the Barley

Mow—" (he motioned to his companion, who dropped five guineas into Gurther's hand)— "I shall introduce to you my friend, Orloff Shillinglaw, and myself, Dare Cutlock."

"I assure your lordships that the Barley Mow is honored," stammered the host, confounded by the liberality of his new patrons. "Let every one in this inn stir himself or herself. Ho! Phillis! Driggs! Timson! To the kitchen—to the stables—everywhere at once. Meg, sweet jade, to the cellar! Bring wine fit for that jolly rake at Whitehall—God bless and God!"

"Hush!" admonished Moll. "That smells of disloyalty."

"I cares neither for you nor the king either, I fags! Don't interrupt me in my inn, when I am a servin' people as pays more generous than a dozen such churls as Charles. I knows Charles very well, egad! And 'tween you and I and the wall, he went away once 'thout payin' his reckonin'. Take notice of which!"

"Say you so!" exclaimed Cutlock, with a grave smile.

"It's wonderfully like his majesty!" said Shillinglaw, with a covert glance at his friend.

"I knows 'em well at Whitehall," answered Gurther, with an important air. And a pretty kettle of fish they is, with their Castlemaines, Nell Gwynns, their Lucy Walmers, and their duchesses!"

A warning look from Mary Glasspool checked the dangerous volatility of Bartemas Gurther. A dark and severe expression appeared on the face of the cavalier in black, while Shillinglaw elevated his brows and shoulders simultaneously.

"There is not a more loyal heart in England than my uncle's," said Ruby, instinctively perceiving that her kinsman was treading perilous ground.

"Heads have been whipped off for words less offensive than those," remarked the man in gray.

"Our host is sound as oak inside," said Moll, quietly.

"What jackanapes is this?" demanded Shillinglaw, knitting his brows.

"Jackanapes is not my name at Whitehall," answered Moll, coolly, holding Gurther's tongue in abeyance with her eyes.

"At Whitehall!" repeated Shillinglaw.

"Im glad that I'm understood," retorted Moll, toying with the hilt of her sword, entirely at her ease.

"What, in St. Peter's name, have you to do at Whitehall?" cried Shillinglaw.

"Very little, I confess. I am page to the king, and the service of his highness is very light, I don't mind telling you, my soldier of fortune."

"The devil!" exclaimed Dare Cutlock, biting his lips.

"I beg your pardon," said Shillinglaw, recovering his equanimity. "I was ignorant of your quality. Had I known you were his majesty's page, I would not have called you a jackanapes, for a hundred nobles! What manner of man is the king?"

"He is a good king enough, but it's my private opinion, not to be spoken abroad, that he could be mightily improved. I can tell you that he has his gallantries, as a merry monarch ought to have; and I have heard, on good authority—heard, did I say?—I have seen it with my own eyes, that he hath been over much familiar with one Mistress Mary Glasspool, a bold creature, well known in London for a hoydenish, worthless baggage. But Charles is a sweet king, nevertheless. There will never be another such king as Charles! I shall throw myself into the Thames when he dies!"

Shillinglaw burst into a loud laugh, in which Dare Cutlock joined.

By this time the wine was brought, and placed on the table in the tap-room, though Gurther was anxious to serve it in his best apartment; to which Cutlock had silently objected by an authoritative motion of the hand.

Ruby had remained, and listened to this conversation with a wondering interest, induced by its extreme novelty. Not unwilling to hear more, and inwardly pleased with the newness of the employment, she smilingly filled the glass that Cutlock caught from the table and held toward her; while Meg, with less embarrassment, rendered the same service to Shillinglaw. The new guests being seated, Cutlock fixed his regards on the audacious Glasspool, and said:

"Will you deign to drink a glass with us, Sir Page? Methinks you should forget distinctions with two honest soldiers who have been in battles, and received honorable wounds."

"To oblige you, good cavaliers," answered Moll, accepting the glass, and placing herself vis-à-vis with him of the scar.

"Might I ask your name, gentle youth?" added Cutlock.

"Edward Starling," replied Glasspool, daintily.

"And a starling that has learned well the use of his tongue," remarked Shillinglaw.

"Having given us your views of the king, tell us what you think of those about him—the Earl of Arlington, for instance."

"God mind Charles Berkeley, the Earl of Arlington!" answered Moll, by no means embarrassed. "He is poor company for so sweet a king. There is not soickerish a fellow in the whole court! He puts wicked things in Charles' head, I can tell you! It is not long since he offered three hundred pounds to the surgeon's wife, to get her husband a pair of horns."

"Heaven have mercy on peers of the realm!" exclaimed Gurther.

Dare Cutlock rubbed his hands with infinite relish, and ogled his companion, whose countenance had suddenly grown dark.

"This is a rare page!" he muttered, glancing at Cutlock. Then to Moll: "Good youth, give your tongue less license, in the name of the pillory and the cart-tail. It is not discreet to slander the king and his household. You are safe with us; but I advise you as a friend not to repeat the story of that pernicious jade, Mary Glasspool, and the surgeon's wife."

"Enough of this!" said Cutlock, with the air of one wont to be obeyed. "Fair damsel, another glass. Never was I served so royally before. Mine host, you should be proud of your niece and daughter."

"Ay, marry, am I!" said Gurther, who had an eye to the thrifit of his inn.

Shillinglaw, exhilarated by the generous vintage, caught Margaret by the arm, and whispered in her ear. Christy Kirk immediately advanced, and indignantly freed her from his grasp, threatening him with a blow for his insolence.

Upon this, the man sprang from his seat, inflamed with anger, and had drawn his sword from its sheath to revenge the interference, when Dare Cutlock laughingly bade him desist.

"You must take life as it comes, good Orloff," said he. "The greatest victories have not been achieved in a moment. Patience! patience! Let there be no brawls at the Barley Mow."

Christy, meantime, drew his hanger, and stood on the defensive.

"Margaret," quoth he, "is not to be insulted by every lascivious gallant that comes along. If you wish to play at the sport of cut and thrust, you won't find me a whit behind you in good will."

"Peace, clodhopper, replied Shillinglaw, contemptuously. "Your presumption will meet its reward soon enough."

"Put up your sword, Christy!" vociferated Gurther. "I'll have no veins opened in my inn. Think you I can't take care of Meg? Is the wench a fool, that I should go for to worry myself?"

Christy sheathed his hanger sullenly.

"You cannot take care of her," he muttered; "and Margaret, though no fool, knows not the danger to which she is exposed."

"I haven't kept a inn for nothing!" persisted Gurther, obstinately. "Boldly herein I set it forth!"

"Let us go!" said Ruby, trembling with alarm.

"Yes, go at once," whispered Christy to Margaret. "These cavaliers mean you no good. They are here to deceive you with their wiles."

Cutlock arose, and carelessly placed himself near the watchmaker's daughter.

"Do not fear," he said, in a low voice. "I must see you again."

"No! no!" returned Ruby, hurriedly. "You and I, sir, ought not to meet. There is treachery and deceit in your eyes. I feel like one in peril."

"Trust not, sweet maiden, the whispers of fancy. If I read the stars aright, there is a destiny before you."

"You cannot mislead me, my lord, or whatever or whoever you are. Remember that I

live in London, with the hum, and bustle, and scandal of the great and powerful about me. Think you one can dwell within the sound of Bow-bells, and not learn something of the ways of the rich and titled? Believe me, sir, I am not one of those you seek. I take it ill that you should presume so much upon my humble condition. There is something I value above smiles and flatteries, worldly honors and gifts."

Ruby turned from Cutlock with flushed cheeks, and, taking Margaret by the hand, left the room.

"Beautiful and modest!" murmured Cutlock. "She will repay pursuit."

"Now," said Christy Kirk to Shillinglaw, "as they are gone whom I most fear to distrust, our quarrel can go on."

"There can be no quarrel between us," answered Shillinglaw, haughtily. "I may chastise your insolence; but that will be no quarrel."

"Cross swords with me, and I care not whether you quarrel or no," retorted Christy, resolutely.

"You are rushing to destruction!" whispered Moll in his ear. "These are persons of rank."

"I fear no man!" said Christy, contracting his brows, and looking threateningly at the cavalier.

"Peace, brawler!" interposed Gurther. "There shall be no bloodshed hereabouts. According govern yourself. Notice take!"

"If there is to be fighting," said Moll, deliberately drawing her weapon, "I take sides with Christy Kirk. As this is a woman-quarrel, I see not why I shouldn't be in it; for I would have you know, my masters, that I have designs on one of those maidens. First come, first served; and I'll abandon my advantage to no man, be his doublet black or gray."

"Impudent varlet!" exclaimed Shillinglaw. "Were no restraint upon me, I would so dash your consummate assurance, that the words 'page' and 'Whitehall' would never again pass your lips."

The self-made page was foppishly feeling the edge of his sword, when the clatter of horses' hoofs was heard outside. Immediately heavy steps resounded in the hall. All eyes were turned to the door, where a tall man, booted to the knees, with a long, curved sword, in a metallic case, clanking at his side, quickly appeared. He wore a conical green beaver, the top of which reached above the lintel of the low door. There was something singular and incongruous about his face, not easily defined. His complexion was darker than the average of men; his features strongly marked and severe; his eyes considerably shaded by his prominent brows, which, curiously enough, were gray. Instead of the exaggerated periuke of the period, he wore, apparently, his own black hair in long, glossy ringlets, that reached the collar of his doublet. The latter, with his coat and trunk-hose, were green, as well as his huge top-boots. His hands were cased in heavy riding-gauntlets, that covered half the fore-arm. His apparel was without ornament, and well became his commanding figure.

A moment of silence followed the advent of this personage. He threw a hasty glance at the parties; then addressing Cutlock, said, in a voice brief and cold:

"My lord, I come from Whitehall."

"Then your business concerns not me," replied Cutlock, uneasily.

"It concerns you so much, that I have the king's warrant for your arrest!" answered the other, his eyes gleaming from beneath the overhanging forehead like half-extinguished fires.

"His majesty has chosen a strange messenger," said Cutlock, changing color, "and one whom I do not remember to have seen in authority near the king's person."

"My lord," said he in green, firmly, "if you would not have your private affairs discussed in this company, step aside with me, and I will satisfy every doubt in regard to my errand. If you fear for your personal safety, let the cavalier in gray attend you."

"Be it so! Come, Shillinglaw, let us humor this giant of Gath, whom, it would appear, is honored with the king's confidence," said Cutlock, carelessly, following the stranger.

"It is our luck to meet the favorites of his majesty to-day!" grumbled Shillinglaw, complying with the wish of his friend. Looking

from a window, Gurther, Christy Kirk, and Kyte Linkhorn saw the three emerge from the door, and stand beneath the sign of the Barley Mow, within three paces of the newcomer's horse—an immense brown steed that stood unfastened, with the bridle-rein flowing loose upon his arching neck.

"My lords," said the man in green, "I will show you my warrant." Instantly there appeared in his hands, as if by magic, a brace of cavalry pistols, which pointed at the heads of Cutlock and Shillinglaw.

This sinister movement was too sudden to be guarded against. It was apparent that he held the lives of both in the touch of his two fingers, which rested lightly on the triggers of the weapons. Both Cutlock and Shillinglaw were too much taken by surprise to do anything but stare at the bold man who had entrapped them.

"I hope, brave gentlemen, that my authority is good and sufficient, and that you will have the sense not to cavil at it. I would not forget to be courteous, but cannot stay to parley. I am in need of contributions in gold, silver, and precious stones. My lords, stand and deliver!"

"You are so courtly," laughed Cutlock, "that I have hopes you will excuse us altogether, and generously remit the tribute."

"Gentlemen, you will please give me no unnecessary trouble. My time is precious. There are those between here and London that I must call on before set of sun. Give alms, I entreat of you!"

There was a deadly glare in the deep-set eyes of the man in green, whose athletic limbs seemed to grow to gigantic proportions in the sight of the cavaliers.

"Throw him the purse!" said Cutlock. "I give you my knightly word, Sir Robber, that I have not a guinea on my person."

"Your word is not to be doubted, noble sir. You oblige me to remind you that you have a watch."

"Pardon me, pink of politeness! The gewgaw quite escaped my memory."

Shillinglaw dropped a purse at the man's feet, and their watches soon kept it company.

"There!" said Cutlock. "I suppose our business is ended?"

"Not so, gentle sir; there is a ring on your finger that I covet."

"Be content without it!" answered Cutlock, hastily, and with embarrassment.

"My arms grow weary; there is a dangerous tremor in my forefingers. The ring! the ring!"

For the first time, the robber's voice was stern and menacing.

"I tell you it cannot be!" replied Cutlock, drawing himself up with great dignity.

"I give you but ten seconds to decide!" retorted the despoiler, knitting his brows, and advancing his weapons some inches nearer.

"I yield!" said Cutlock, moodily, drawing the ring reluctantly from his finger. "You will find it of little intrinsic value." He threw it down with the other articles, but it was evident that it went sorely against his will.

"Thanks! Turn your backs toward me. Thanks again! You are most obliging, gentlemen. I trust this will not be our last meeting."

The man in green swooped up the booty, dropped it into his pocket, sprang to the saddle, and was off in a moment on the old road to London. The heavy tramp of his horses' feet was heard some time, sweeping over the Heath of Hounslow.

CHAPTER IV.

THE IMP OF THE BRUSH.

A black and ancient pile, known by the sign of the Woman's Head, stood nearly opposite the dwelling of Primus Mallows, the watchmaker of Clerkenwell, Red Lion street. The device which at that date gave the fabric its name, was a woman's head clumsily painted on wood, and hung beneath an upper central window by an iron crane. Up two flights of dejected stairs might have been found, on opening a squeaking door, a rookery of the fine arts, of which one Ajax Bransom was the life and soul.

Entering this dusky lurking-place of art, the visitor was at once impressed by the multiplicity of feminine heads which met his gaze on every side. There were women in full; women abbreviated in various cruel ways; women cut off at the waist; women bisected

just beneath the clavicles; women dismembered at the fourth cervical vertebra; women with nothing but face. If here and there one of the luckless subjects of the artist's glowing imagination was discovered sitting, standing, or lying, every such instance was characterized by a lamentable poverty of wearing apparel.

Ajax Bransom was one whose artistic might was consecrated to woman; woman abridged or woman *in toto*. He had passed the half-way house of life, and was stumping downward as fast as wicked habits could carry him. The handwriting of Sin was on his brow, and readable in the crow-feet under his blinking eyes. There was a bare spot on the top of his head, worn smooth by the friction of time; or possibly the crop had failed through the barrenness of the soil. Short, stiff hair, mottled with gray, bristled from the lower circumference of the head; while the same kind of grizzly brush sprouted like bats' wings from each side of his face. A physiognomist would have called the latter loquacious and egotistical. His mouth was large and sensual, while his nose stood a bulky sentinel over it.

The painter of Red Lion street had a distorted body; either one leg was too long or the other too short. When standing on his feet, Ajax was a great deal awry; and he was mentally and morally askew in whatever posture he might be. Nature sometimes sets her mark on bad men.

A week had elapsed since the scene at Hounslow. Ajax, of the Woman's Head, was laboring under excitement. With his head depressed, his shriveled body pendulating to the play of his unequal legs, his hands moving like the arms of a windmill, he went muttering up and down the lumbered limits of his lair. As often as he came back to the goal, he looked over the way impatiently. At length he paused, and shook a fist toward the dwelling of Primus Mallows.

"A dauber! A black spider, weaving webs!" he articulated, slowly and vindictively. "The watchmaker said so to my face."

Ajax seized a brush, as if to paint his wrath, in horrible caricature, in the air.

"A spider weaving webs! Let us remember that, Mr. Mallows. Your girl's head is too good for me to paint! It would contaminate her to enter this room! We will lay that away with the rest."

The lame artist plunged across his garret again, as if to take a bath of pictures.

"My studio reeks with the airs of St. Giles. None but vile and pimping people visit the Woman's Head." All that to my teeth! All that to Ajax Bransom, who has painted court ladies, countesses, and duchesses!"

He paused to inwardly query whether he had really painted ladies of high degree, either in part or in full. While whipping and goading his memory, the fall of a picture caused him to turn to the door with a start. Angry rebuke that he was resolved to let fly at the intruder, stopped on the threshold of his mouth. A man stood within the circle of the head-haunted garret, from whose fixed gaze he shrank with secret terror. The face of this visitor was narrow and pinched, and startlingly pale. His eyes did not shine—they glittered. His straight, coal-black hair, falling over his broad white forehead and colorless cheeks, imparted a grim, Satanic expression that made Bransom quail and cower. The figure was meagre and tall, and there was not an article of apparel on it other than the gloomiest black. He wore shoes with large silver buckles, and his conical hat was without feather. This spectral figure reminded Bransom of infernal personages that he had heard of. He waited for him to speak, and make known his business, but he continued to look at the artist with a mocking smile.

"What do you want?" faltered Bransom.

"To see you," answered the man, in a voice that apparently came from his stomach, it was so deep and rumbling, and such an arrant departure from the ordinary compass of human articulation.

The painter retreated a step.

"Why would you see me?" he asked.

"To know where to find you when due!" said the visitor, with a chest-laugh that was hollow and unnatural.

A superstitious spasm pulsed over the painter. Had there been another way of egress, he would have fled to the street. He slowly backed to the farthest limit of his studio.

"Will you come a little more to the point?" he said, just above his breath.

"You're coming! You're on the road! You're one of 'em!" answered the visitor.

"One of whom?" demanded Bransom, much at a loss.

"No matter. Don't heed me. Go on as you have begun. Keep adding sin to sin, and crime to crime. Deceive the innocent; lay snares for the weak; take the virtuous by guile. Don't stop!"

The blood-freezing stranger drew nearer to Bransom, and his laugh grew more frightful.

"Go! leave me! I want nothing of you!" cried the artist, pale and trembling.

"And yet," added the man, suddenly changing his manner, "I doubt not that you will have more of me than you know of."

He dropped himself into a chair.

"This is the very hot-bed of art," he went on, mockingly. "I see only the faces of women here, Bransom. Paint me, imp of the brush, paint me!"

He leaned back in the chair, and made a shocking face.

"You are the devil!" gasped the painter. "Begone!"

"So you recognize me at last? We shall meet often. You must not forget me. Think of me when you think of the watchmaker's daughter, and the innkeeper's daughter, and Dare Cutlock, and Orloff Shillinglaw, and purses of gold, and all the evil you have done and intend to do."

He laughed hoarsely down below.

"Did you ever dream of Tyburn or the Tower?" he added. "But I fear I disturb you in your idol-temple. One of your emissaries is at hand, and I will go. Spin out your thread, Bransom—spin out your thread! Weave your webs in this place of skulls and nakedness. Are there panders at Clerkenwell? Are there thieves at St. Giles, and highwaymen on Hounslow Heath? Have you painted Jane Acre, and Bab Crowfoot, and the Roaring Girl? I, too, am fond of heads! It delights me that our tastes are so similar."

As Bransom stood wondering and awed, the grim phantom in black showed his white teeth, waved his hand, and went out. The painter leaned against the wall, weak and shivering.

The squeak of the door, and the light step of a girl, partially restored his courage. The person who entered was about eighteen years of age, respectably clad, with a face by no means disagreeable, though indicative of cunning rather than depth of intellect. The sight of this young woman caused the painter to rally at once his scattered wits.

"Is it you, Craw Kibbie? I've had an ugly fright. The devil has been here, I believe."

"The devil is all about here!" said Craw Kibbie, making a sweep around the room with her hand. "He is in all these painted faces. But we won't mind him. I've got the place at the watchmaker's. His daughter is mistress, and I am maid. I'm across the way, bag and baggage."

In the pleasure of hearing this, Bransom forgot his fright. His pale features blazed up like a fire when it is blown with the breath.

"In the enemies' camp, eh? It is mighty well, Craw Kibbie. Be careful how you step, girl! You will upset the Duchess of Cleveland, if you flirt your dress in that way."

"Duchess, indeed! That is Jane Acre, of St. Giles, and that next it, Mistress Crowfoot. Ah, you spider! You said to each: 'What a splendid turn of the head!'"

The painter having arisen to preserve the ghostly shadow of Jane Acre of St. Giles, Kibbie made no scruples of sliding herself into the seat he had vacated. Bransom turned a picture, stretched over a wood frame, upon its side, and with the jerking motions of a monkey, perched himself upon its edge, his short limb hanging over the daubed canvas without touching the floor.

"Put your finger tenderly on my 'art,'" he said, wincing. "Don't touch the raw spots, my wasp."

"That for all your daubs!" exclaimed Kibbie, with a contemptuous snap of her thumb and finger. "I hate these fragments of women," she went on; "I can't see in 'em what you see in 'em; because what you see in 'em isn't in 'em, but in yourself. I'd give more to know who I'm taking this trouble for, than for all these smirking faces put together."

"A mystery! — a mystery!" whispered

Bransom, masking one side of his face with his open hand.

"A mystery? Give it to me! It is as much for me as for you. The life of Craw Kibbie is a mystery. She breathes mystery, eats and drinks mystery, in mystery sleeps and wakes. Disgorge, you spider! Give me the end of your thread, or I'll bring no flies to your net. The paw that pulls the chestnuts from the fire gets burnt. I'll be paw to nobody blindly. Out with it, or I'll grope the ashes no more. If it's for you, it won't do; if it's for a simple, slip-slop gentleman, it won't do; if it's for a humdrum lord, it won't do. An earl or a duke is another matter. What do you say, Spiderlegs?"

Bransom started up with a sharp, angry cry, like that extorted from a caged beast by the application of a hot taming-iron. He pranced across the room, ducking and gesticulating.

"Craw Kibbie," he said, returning, "don't goad me too much!"

"If I am the enemy of my own sex, what am I to yours? I am a deadly poison, to be used only in small doses. Don't take too much of me, man! I follow my own wild will because I choose to. I am faithful as long as the idle whim is on me. Enough! Now who is Dare Cutlock?"

She pounced upon the painter so suddenly with this question, that he was flurried.

"Dare Cutlock is Dare Cutlock," he answered, presently. "That is all I know, or have any business to know, or any safety in knowing. The secrets of the great are dangerous. One very powerful and rich, loves the watchmaker's handsome daughter. This person is your employer, your rewarder, and your theme. Dare Cutlock is to be artfully drawn into all your discourses with your young mistress. His love and generosity are to be played on as a stringed instrument. Lay traps for her heart; set snares for her imagination; raise dazzling heights for her girlish ambition to mount on."

"Cease, dotard!" said Kibbie, restive under his wordiness. While both were busy with their plots for the entanglement of unwary feet, neither saw the monstrosity that crept up the stairs on all-fours, slipped through the open door, and crouched behind a picture. This object was about three feet high, with a bloated head, face enough for a giant, old and impish, and arms so long that the fingers nearly touched the ground when he stood erect. His movements were quick as those of the monkey, and the strength of his limbs prodigious. Now and then he popped his grinning visage above the picture, and peered and listened with keen enjoyment. Whenever Bransom and Kibbie changed position, or paused, his enormous head sank back behind its shield. The appearance of the cripple seemed to please him mightily. There was, to his apprehension, an impish relationship between them, the discovery and realization of which convulsed his defrauded body with silent merriment.

"Come, come, girl! Let us be friends," said the painter, in a conciliating tone. "Have your own way. Cutlock must see Ruby Mallows. He has not seen her since that chance meeting at the Barley Mow. He swears he will come at her, if he has to go in at windows."

"He shall see her," replied the girl, and she made a mental vow at the same time that she would know who Dare Cutlock really was, despite the warning of Ajax.

"My crayon, my sweet fancy-sketch," wheedled the cripple; "you shall have a purse of nobles. How those nobles will shine!"

The old, egotistical smile came back to the pander's eyes.

"You think to finger most of those same nobles," thought Craw Kibbie. She thought this and much more; more than was in the head of the leering old sinner roosting like a raven on the edge of the picture.

"Who is that springal that I see go in and out of the watchmaker's door so often, of late?" he wished to know.

"The new apprentice," answered the girl. "I was going to tell you of him. You'll want to know his name; it is Dyce Hungerford. Look you, Spiderlegs! This fellow spoils every piece of work that comes into his hands, and can see no one at the Three Dials but Ruby Mallows. Put that in your pipe and smoke it."

"Provoking jade!" snarled Ajax. Then, thinking better of it: "You have not mentioned Margaret, the little witch of the Barley Mow. Orloff Shillinglaw swears that he would have given fifty guineas rather than she should have seen that robbery at her father's inn. Both the coy wenches witnessed the whole transaction from an upper window. They didn't grieve over it, I'll be bound! It was a splendid robbery! I believe there never was a robbery equal to it, save that of Sir Henry Bennett and Lady Castlemaine, a few nights before. And, what is most wonderful, he liberated a state prisoner from the Tower of London, after the robbery at the inn."

The human grub behind the picture grimaced from ear to ear.

"How could that be?" inquired Kibbie.

"Who knows? who knows? It is one of those unaccountable things that bother people's brains once in a long time."

Bransom went off for a moment into a region of thought. He still sat on the picture-edge. With his head and lean body thrown forward to preserve his equilibrium as well as to bring him nearer to Kibbie, with his coarse, scanty hair bristling around the base of his head, like a wreath of dead thorns, he presented an elfish and striking figure.

"Margaret Gurther is over there," said Kibbie, pointing across the way. "Let her courtly suitor look well to his heart. And to Christy Kirk, too."

"Christy will be provided for!" prophesied Bransom, lifting himself from his reverie. "Ah! don't stir—remain as you are. Pshaw! it's gone. You always spoil everything. It was a very good turn of the head for a commonplace body like you. I'll get my brush."

"You don't do it!" said Kibbie. "I'm going, Spiderlegs."

"Move gently among my gods! Disturb not a head. Keep that apprentice in sight. Look out for your gown, hussy! Don't run against that Magdalen. What think you of that superb picture of Nell Gwynn? That is the Dutchess of Richmond by the door."

"What is that?" laughed the girl, as with her foot she spun a bold face half-way across the garret, and made a flying exit from the art-rookery of the Woman's Head.

"A cursed Mischief!" growled Bransom. "I am losing my influence over that girl. I must watch Craw Kibbie. Ay! ay! ay!"

The sprawling pigmy behind the picture flattened his three feet of deformity on the dirty floor, and patiently waited an opportunity to escape.

CHAPTER V.

THE APPRENTICE—GRUB, THE DWARF.

If the affections of Ruby Mallows had not been pre-engaged, it is probable that the sudden appearance and courtly grace of Dare Cutlock would have impressed her deeply. But that fluttering thing called a heart, having been surreptitiously appropriated by another, she was comparatively safe from the assaults of the prepossessing stranger.

Her cousin Margaret accompanied her home, to spend a few weeks in London, having been suitably warned to beware of gallants and intrigues by the honest but not far-sighted Bartemas Gurther. Both these young women were inspired with a secret dread of Shillinglaw and Cutlock, whom, they were persuaded, were far different in station from what they wished to appear. That they were two noblemen from the dissolute court of Charles, they doubted not. They had questioned Mary Glasspool at the Barley Mow, but elicited nothing but vague and mysterious answers, which left the subject as much in the dark as before.

Ruby Mallows was far from suspecting that the introduction of Craw Kibbie into the family, had anything to do with Dare Cutlock or Orloff Shillinglaw. She was rather pleased with the girl, and disposed to make her a friend and confidant.

On going down one morning into her father's shop, after her visit to Hounslow, she was greatly surprised to see Dyce Hungerford seated at a window, with a glass thrust into his eye, inspecting the complicated and scattered mechanism of a watch. She stood a moment in mute amazement, looking at her lover in his new employment. Impressed, presently, by a sense of the ludicrous, and instantly detecting his want of skill, she could

not repress a soft yet merry laugh. The young man turned toward Ruby with the glass still in his eye, producing a vast amount of redness and distortion on that side of the face. He tried to look serious, but a smile gradually broke over his features.

"What are you doing, Mr. Hungerford? Why are you cruelly afflicting yourself with that magnifying glass? I'm afraid you'll put out your eye, sir!" said Ruby, when she had sufficiently mastered her mirth.

"I cry your mercy!" answered Hungerford, placing his glass upon the shelf before him, and arising. "I am here to learn the useful art of watchmaking. Your worthy father's trade has for me many attractions." He took her unresisting hand. "And you," he added, sinking his voice, "are the chiefest of them all."

"This is not well, I think, Dyce Hungerford," she answered, blushing at the intensity of his gaze. "It is wrong thus to deceive my kind, though sometimes choleric, father. I am sure you will never learn to make a watch."

"He can learn to *make love!*" screamed a squeaking voice that seemed to issue from the wall. Both Ruby and the young man were alarmed at this interruption. They searched the room, but could find no one. Baffled but not satisfied, they looked inquisitively at each other. Just then, the door of a large clock was pushed open, and a quaint and curious figure stepped from the inside. It was the dwarf, whose cheated and uncouth person has been described. He made a low, grotesque bow, swinging his long arms, then placing his hands upon a counter that traversed one side of the shop, hopped upon it like an ape.

Ruby was terrified, and shrank from the grimacing and repellent character. Not much argument would have been needed to convince her that it was an emissary of Satan. Dyce Hungerford, however, though annoyed, did not take the intrusion so seriously. He frowned and shook his head at the shape—pantomime which Ruby, in her perturbation, did not notice.

"Do not fear," he said to his fair companion. "This misshapen thing will not harm you. It is of human, not infernal origin, as you are half disposed to believe. Speak to him, Ruby, and my word for it, he'll answer."

"Who are you? Or perhaps I should say, What are you?" she asked, in obedience to the suggestion of Hungerford.

"A mortal, like you," answered the dwarf; "although," he added, with a sardonic chuckle, "not compounded with so scrupulous regard to the law of proportions as yourself. Your arms are shorter than mine, mistress. Ha! ha! They are smaller, and they are whiter; but they are not so strong. You are good for the ground, but you can't scramble up the side of a house, or cling to the coping of a roof with your fingers. You cannot leap like a monkey, or run along the leads, or swing yourself in at windows, or drop through sky-lights and down chimneys."

"Where do you live?" pursued Ruby.

The manikin leered cunningly.

"That's what I know and you don't, mistress. I can take care of myself, which is more than you can do."

"What is your name?"

"My name is Grub. Grub! Grub! Grub! Don't you wish your name was Grub?"

I come and I go
Above and below—
And none of you know
How happens it so.
Yo-ho! yo-ho!"

The dwarf sang this distich in a voice strident and screaming. The chorus came from a great depth, and went up to a great height—now hoarse, now thin and shrill.

Fair maid, beware!
Look everywhere
Before you dare
Your heart to spare.
Yi-yare! yi-yare!"

"What brings you here?" demanded Hungerford.

"What brings you here? 'Tis eyes, and mouth, and voice; in short, 'tis woman. But go your way. You are walking over mines." Then to Ruby: "Dainty creature, this is dangerous pastime. Go one to the east, the other to the west."

Grub waved his long arms in opposite directions.

"Life is sweeter than love. Love, like butter, melts in the mouth and that's the end of

it. It is like a dinner of wines, that leaves but lightness of the head and craving of the stomach."

Grub laughed at his own wit, then went on again in his strange and ever-varying tones, which ran up and down like the scale of a flute rapidly fingered. He raised himself on the counter by his hands, and drawing up his legs, oscillated between his arms like the pendulum of a clock.

"A pasty is worth a hundred kisses. For that matter, I'd rather have one than many. Bah! what are lips? Ashes, ashes, ashes! You, Dyce Hungerford, take to your heels and run, run, run! Would you see the Traitor's Gate? Would you go into the Tower by water? I know of dungeons twenty feet below the level of the Thames. There are chains down there rusted by the perpetual damps."

He stopped and drummed on his perch with his feet.

"A pretty pair! What a pity that the foolery couldn't go on!"

Oh, the wooing,
The billing and the cooing
Will be your undoing;
'Tis Death you're pursuing."

"Speak plainly," said Hungerford. "I won't!" cried Grub, angrily. "You know what I mean, and you see the danger."

"To what does this singular being refer?" asked Ruby, terrified by his mysterious admonitions. "My heart misgives me, Dyce Hungerford."

"Heed him not; these are but meaningless gibberings."

"You lie!" screamed the dwarf, fiercely. "Your blood be on your own head!"

Grub cast himself from his perch, and with a single summerset alighted on a box beside Ruby, and throwing one of his arms around her neck, drew her head toward him, and whispered:

"Watch Craw Kibbie!"

Ruby screamed with affright, but before she had time to resist or push him from her, he had whirled himself from the room and disappeared.

CHAPTER VI.

WATCHMAKING AND WATCHMENDING.

The watchmaker's daughter and the apprentice, by the abrupt departure of Grub, were again left together. The opportunity was too precious to be lost, and Dyce Hungerford, in well-chosen words, told the story of his love.

"With you," said he, at the conclusion of the glowing avowal, "I should feel my happiness secured, and my life fortified against the possible vicissitudes of the future."

"Our acquaintance has not been of long duration," said Ruby, "but I feel an inward assurance that you are worthy of confidence. Be not too hasty; take time to consider well, and above all, abandon this impracticable scheme of pursuing a business for which I am sure Nature has not fitted you. I know the motive of your conduct, and it is flattering to me; but I cannot escape the conviction that it is dangerous to yourself. The words of the unfortunate being who has just left us, have, I confess, affected me much. I fully believe that he did not speak at random."

Ruby turned her soft and beaming eyes inquiringly upon her lover.

"A mad manikin, my girl!" he replied, returning her questioning glance with a look of passionate fondness.

"A sense of unknown peril is not all that troubles me," resumed Ruby. "There are times when you appear too learned, and superior to your position."

Dyce Hungerford was framing a reply, when Kyte Linkhorn surprised the parties in very close neighborhood.

"Wot is 'ere? Wot dewevelopments is this?" he wished to know, putting his arms akimbo, throwing his body back, and tipping his head toward the right shoulder. "Isn't this learnin' the business with too much velocity? I served a 'prenticeship o' seven year, and never got advanced like this."

"I was talking with Mr. Hungerford about—about a new movement that he talks of getting up," said Ruby, laughing at the infelicity of her invention.

"It would be adwisable for him to find out how to put together the *old* movement as is common among us," replied Linkhorn, point-

ing to the shelf upon which lay the scattered parts of the disemboweled watch.

"I think, my friend," said Hungerford, "that I can contrive a new escapement."

"Ere's inventions!" said Mr. Linkhorn, sarcastically. "Atween you two there'll be contrivances. Wot watches there'll be! My heye!" The apprentice unconsciously looked at Mr. Linkhorn's eye to see if anything was the matter with it. "If your mind runs on escapements, I advises you to make one through the door or winder; for if Primus Mallers should light on ye a lengthenin' the hair-spring of his darter's affections, he'd so take the tick out o' your movement, that you wouldn't go ag'in for a twelvemonth."

"Come—come, Linkhorn! You're not a vicious fellow, and you needn't try to make the apprentice think so," said Ruby, coaxingly.

"I know that a gal's heart is her main-spring; and when the main-spring of that kind o' timekeeper is tampered with, it never runs reg'lar arterwards. Sometimes it vibrates slow, and sometimes it vibrates fast. That is the dewelopments."

After these profound deductions, Linkhorn was taking his seat at the board where he was in the habit of sitting, when the street-door rang the little larum that was attached to it; announcing the entrance of a customer. The person who entered drew Ruby's attention, nor could she prevent her regards from resting upon him while he approached the long, low table or counter, and addressed himself to Linkhorn.

"My watch," he said, "refuses to keep time. Will you look at it?" He passed the watch over the table to Mr. Mallows' assistant. His voice made Ruby start. Had she not heard it at the Barley Mow? She half thought, she feared so. She could not help associating him with the robbery at Hounslow? But his outward man was essentially changed—providing her suspicions were correct—there being nothing about his apparel to remind one of that daring highwayman. There was a similitude of face, but without that sternness and severity that marked the features of the robber of Dare Cutlock and his friend. The visage before her was grave, yet mild in expression. The watchmaker's daughter was afraid to encourage her surmises; but in spite of a determination not to notice him, looked at him persistently.

He was plainly and richly dressed, with nothing about him to signify that he ranked any higher than a wealthy citizen. The moment he came in, Hungerford hurried to his shelf, thrust his horn-encircled glass painfully into his right eye, and with his back turned somewhat to the man, applied himself assiduously to the fragments of the dissected watch.

Ruby could not help smiling at his sudden industry. Perhaps a little vanity unconsciously mixed with her silent mirth.

Kyte Linkhorn took the watch with professional coolness, and opening the large silver case, studded with diamonds, peered into the mute mechanism. The wheels had stopped. The journeyman watchmaker drew an interesting moral from the fact.

"It has stopped, as *you* will stop, and as *he* and *she* will stop, and as *I* will stop, when the vitality has gone." The owner of the watch nodded assent to this instructive thought. "There is this difference between the dewelopments of a man and a watch, or a woman, and a watch: When the inside works of a woman or a man stops dead, and stands dumb, there's no startin' 'em ag'in; but you can invigorate a watch."

The journeyman enunciated this with some dogmatism of manner.

"You should have been a parish clerk," said the stranger, dryly.

Mr. Linkhorn raised his eyes slowly to the man whose watch he held in his left hand, with a great black glass buried in his eye, and a small pair of steel pliers poised daintily in his right. By the pursing of his eyebrows, Ruby expected to hear something severe; but was amazed to see Mr. Linkhorn wilt like new-mown hay in the hot sun. The glass fell out of his eye, and rolled on the floor; the pliers went to look after the glass, while the hand that held the watch, dropped upon his knee.

The stranger's brow knitted to a sinister frown; the broad forehead grew dark and severe, and the eyes beneath darted at Linkhorn like two tongues of fire. For some sec-

onds, he held the watchmaker dumb and motionless with the mere weight of his frown and the glitter of his gaze.

"The mischief can be repaired, I suppose?" he observed, presently, laying two guineas upon the counter.

Kyte Linkhorn struggled out of his wilted state, and said:

"It can be started ag'in, your honor."

"Very good, my honest friend," replied the other. "I perceive that you are a man of wisdom and discernment. He placed peculiar emphasis on the words wisdom and discernment, glancing at Ruby, whose beauty appeared to have the same effect upon him as upon many others, who had had the good or ill fortune to see her.

She saw his look, and the change that swept over his face. Though not offended, she was annoyed. His gaze was not only intense, but pertinacious.

"When can I have it?" he asked. He looked at Hungerford.

"To morrow," said Linkhorn.

"Very well," he rejoined, transfixing the journeyman with his glittering eyes. "I'll come for it."

With another glance at Ruby, he slowly withdrew from the shop.

Linkhorn hung the watch on a little hook, and stared at it.

"What has come over you?" queried Ruby.

"I don't know," he answered, absently. "I think I've been reminded of something I can't think of. There's dewelopments some wheres, but I can't get hold of 'em."

"You didn't ask his name?" added Ruby.

"Hang me if I didn't forget it!" exclaimed Linkhorn, slapping his knee with his hand. "I'll run after him and ask." He sprang from his stool and ran into the street. He came back in a moment, muttering to himself:

"Nightshade, forsooth! Nightshade of the White and Black! Nightshade with a wengence!"

"Nightshade!" repeated Ruby. "Was there anything about that man that surprised you, Kyte?"

The journeyman reflected before answering.

"I might seen something and then I mightn't. A wise man never tells more than he knows, nor quite so much."

"True, true!" replied Ruby. "I commend your prudence. There is much gossip in London about the White and Black."

"If anything pops into your mind that is werry vague and uncertain, don't be in haste about lettin' it loose. If you don't let it loose, nobody can take the adwantage. Let it loose, and somebody *will* take the adwantage. That's wot I calls policy, Mistress Mallers. It's a virtue w'ich, in them as hasn't got it, comes out at the little end o' the orn. Let them within the sound o' my voice profit by the same."

Mr. Linkhorn jerked his head toward Dyce Hungerford, who, on that particular morning, seemed fated to have the bitter mingled in large proportion with the sweet; for Primus Mallows, as it soon appeared, had been watching him for the last half-minute from a door in the rear, opening into the shop from his dwelling. This worthy artisan ran at the young man in a violent passion.

"The villain has destroyed a movement!" he vociferated, seizing Hungerford by the shoulder and shaking him. "Kyte Linkhorn, why did you sit there and see him destroy a movement?"

"I didn't sit here and see him do it. 'Twas done afore I come in. It's too late to help it now; let him squint at it as long as he likes. He'll put his right heye out, by-and-by, that chap will. Don't touch him; he's an invento!"

The journeyman threw a contemptuous look at the apprentice, and winked slyly at Ruby.

"Them pivots was set on rubies, and if he hasn't got more nor one ruby out o' kilter, I don't know a hair-spring from a mainspring."

The watchmaker's daughter blushed, and held up a threatening finger to Linkhorn.

"This devil of an apprentice will ruin me!" grumbled Mallows. "Twenty guineas won't restore this watch to its former condition."

"Worthy sir," replied Hungerford, biting his lips to preserve his gravity, "this is my own watch, which, being deeply interested in

your most delicate art, I took in pieces to examine at my leisure. I expect to derive great advantage from this experiment."

"So much that you'll lose your watch!" retorted Mallows, somewhat mollified.

"Far be it from me," returned Hungerford, "to take such a liberty with one of your incomparable time-keepers. As for the ruby settings, I trust none of them are the worse for my interesting investigations."

Mr. Linkhorn hitched back on his stool, erected his lean trunk, threw his long head a little to one side, and cocked his eyes at the apprentice.

"Wot a woller it is!"

The journeyman did not change his position; he kept his eyes at a full cock, while the ghost of a smile gradually traversed his lips, illuminating the lower part of his face and relieving its recent severity. The last expression that escaped from his mouth appeared to give vent to his comical amazement.

"Wot a wiwacious youth! Wot a 'ead! My heye, wot a 'ead!" Mr. Linkhorn made a rhetorical pause, and gently swept his recovered pliers through the unresisting air. "This is the 'ead," he eloquently went on, "that inventors is made of."

His humorous optics descended enough of the segment of a circle to take in the pretty person of Ruby, whom he favored with a grotesque leer. His satisfied countenance said, as palpably as countenance could: "How I have these two people under my thumb!"

"Girl," said Primus Mallows, "are you learning the business, too? You'll take a movement to pieces, won't you, by-and-by? You seem mightily pleased, egad! at this villain's blunders."

The old watchmaker of Clerkenwell pursed his chin and nether lip toward his nose, as much as possible, and looked at his daughter in a high state of rebuke.

"I wanted to set my watch," stammered Ruby.

"Go along, hussy!" retorted Mr. Mallows, testily. Then to Hungerford: "You and I, my springal, will have to part company. What the devil is the fellow quizzing at through that glass? Kyte, you rascal, can't you put him in the way of doing something useful? We can't have idlers about the Three Dials. The reputation of the Three Dials must be kept up."

Linkhorn had plunged into another subject, and was completely drowned to Mr. Mallows; he was staring at the stranger's watch, and traveling a pathway of thought utterly unknown to his worthy master.

"What are you moping at, you dog?" sputtered the latter.

"Please, sir, may I stick up this 'ere bill?" inquired a forlorn boy, thrusting a moppy head into the Three Dials, and gradually working in after it a ragged little body. He carried in one dirty hand a printed bill, and in the other dirty hand a paste-pot and brush.

"You boy," said Mr. Linkhorn, reviving somewhat, "you boy, you, 'ang it on a nail. Don't swab your paste round here."

The boy hung the bill on a nail as he was bidden.

"There! begone, you warmint!"

Mr. Linkhorn said this from sheer habit of finding fault with all the boys who ventured into the Three Dials. He had been known to throw things. Mr. Linkhorn had, and was an object of some terror to tattered urchins. The ingenious artificer did not at first deign to notice the printed waif left by the moppy head; but presently, and probably without conscious effort, he found himself looking at it; and the effect of the sight was such that he automatically made a swimming motion with his hands, and unfortunately, with such force, and in such a direction, that he swept half the curious implements from his board, together with sundry fractions of movements that chanced to be undergoing repairs. A cylindrical glass, placed on a precious agglomeration of wheels, pivots, and chains, was ruthlessly swooped to the floor and dashed into numberless fragments.

Mr. Mallow's arms were obstensibly and despairingly flung in air.

"We are all going to smash!" he vociferated. "Kyte Linkhorn, you incendiary, close this shop. Egad! we might as well give up business as to go on in this way."

Mr. Linkhorn was as entirely oblivious to the passion of his employer, as if that indi-

vidual had not been within gun-shot of the Three Dials. He shot from his stool like a grain of corn in the act of popping, and describing half a circle, alighted the other side of the long table or counter interposing between him and the wall on which the bill had been placed. This was a spasm of emotion to which Linkhorn was unaccustomed, and its effect, in the present instance, on Mallows, was quite remarkable.

"Odds fish! Marry come down!"

The last exclamation was one which the watchmaker reserved for extraordinary occasions, when his feelings needed special ventilation.

"The devil and all! Ruby, jade, run for a strait-jacket and a blister larger than your mother's apron. This Linkhorn's head must be shaved, and blood must be let in a jiffy. Who's got a knife? Bring a little tub; I can stab a vein myself. If I get hold of him, damme if I don't let out a paifful!"

The journeyman, meantime, began to read, in a muttering voice, utterly unaware of the consternation his conduct was producing in the excitable mind of his master, whose first act was to edge cautiously to the door and lock it, to prevent the escape of the madman.

"Five hundred guineas!" the lips of Linkhorn were heard murmuring. "Five hundred guineas! Life of God! Five hundred guineas for the apprehension and delivery to justice of that notorious highwayman who recently robbed two gentlemen at the Barley Mow, Hounslow Heath, and divers and sundry other persons of consequence, among whom are Sir Henry Bennet, Lady Castlemaine, the Duchess of Richmond, and the Duchess of Portsmouth. This audacious highwayman is supposed to be lurking about London; and all good subjects of His Gracious Majesty are commanded to aid the magistrates of the kingdom in bringing him to condign punishment. He is spoken of, by those who have had the misfortune to encounter him, as a man of large stature and goodly presence, but of a countenance exceedingly dark and stern, while his eyes do attract much attention by their brightness. He sometimes appears in a mask of White and Black. The above sum in gold shall be paid to the person or persons who may be chiefly instrumental in his seizure. By order of the Lord Mayor of London."

Kyte Linkhorn read this over three times, before he came out of his paralysis, and by that time Primus Mallows had seized him from behind, and holding him tightly, cried out lustily for assistance. The journeyman, finding himself thus roughly dealt with, was greatly astonished, and had much to do to struggle clear of the watchmaker.

"Damme, sir!" exclaimed the latter, turning upon Dyce Hungerford, "why don't you throw yourself upon this madman, and help me secure him? He must lose blood, I tell you! And may the devil fly away with me if I don't open a vein!"

At this position of affairs, Ruby thought it time to interpose, for she began to comprehend how matters stood. It was some time, however, before her father could be made to forego his sanguinary purpose, by swearing soundly that the letting of a bucket of blood would be of infinite advantage, not only to Linkhorn, but to himself in a pecuniary point of view, inasmuch as it would save a destruction of property in the paroxysms of this new-fangled distemper.

Linkhorn now fell to capering about the room, laughing and snapping his fingers, which was rather unfortunate for the theory set up by the young woman, that his eccentric conduct was the result of terror produced by the announcement that the dreaded and terrible highwayman, whom he had seen at the Barley Mow, and of whom he had heard so many direful tales, was, as the bill had it, "lurking about London."

"Five hundred guineas!" he whispered, dancing up to Ruby. "Think of that! With five hundred guineas I can marry Jenty Mandrake, and set up housekeeping almost like a lord!"

He made another dive among the clocks, boxes, and watches, and coming back to Ruby, who stood in his orbit, said:

"Wot dewelopments! My heye!"

"Hush, you simpleton!" admonished Ruby, in a suppressed voice. "My father has good reason to think you crazy. If you have

a secret, keep it, and don't be a dolt. You haven't got your guineas yet; and there'll be time enough to cut antics when you hear them clinking in your pocket."

"There's no fear but I'll have 'em. Soul of my body! Do you think I'll let 'em filter through my fingers? Ha'n't I got a hold on him? Won't he come for the watch? Lord of my life! Kyte Linkhorn can see as deep into a mill-stone as the man as picks it. Don't worry about me, Mistress Mallers, I'm a little wiwacious at the present speakin', but anon I'll be as vigorous in my 'ead as the Lord Mayor himself."

The elated workman seized his hat, unlocked the door, and was soon running along Red Lion street, to tell Jenty Mandrake of his good fortune.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PURSUIT OF GUINEAS.

Kyte Linkhorn hurried through various streets to Red Lion Square, thence to Shoe Lane, Spitalfields. There was a whirl of excitement, a fever of expectation, in his brain. The prospective five hundred guineas loomed, before his imagination, an enormous and inexhaustible treasure. He had much to communicate to Jenty Mandrake, the weaver's daughter. That day of happiness which unbending circumstances had hitherto pushed so far away into the future, was now really at hand. He saw his wedding-night; Linkhorn was of a sanguine temperament, and his fancy traveled fast.

He did not stop to give a premonitory knock at Theobold Mandrake's door, but lifting the latch hastily, rushed in, panting, frantically embraced a young woman, and nearly pulled the arms off a middle-aged man engaged at a loom. His sudden and impetuous coming produced various and contradictory emotions in the minds of his friends, who had never before seen him in such an excited condition.

Having driven Jenty to a corner, he proceeded to astonish and confound her by extravagant avowals of sudden wealth, mysterious hints, equivocal intimations, and the general vagueness of his statements. He squeezed her hand; he pinched her cheeks; he smoothed her hair; he darted his finger playfully at those parts under the arms of girls supposed to be peculiarly sensitive; drawing abruptly back, shrugging his shoulders, and emitting a startling little hiss at each particular dive. This singular conduct reddened Jenty very much, who properly informed him that he ought to be ashamed of himself. With all her arts, coquettices, and reprimands, she could not reduce him to his normal coolness and sobriety. It was not without apprehension for his safety that she saw him depart.

He set off for the nearest magistrate, but, changing his mind on the way, concluded to lay the whole matter before the lord mayor. After various annoyances, and waiting two hours, in an ante-room, he gained audience with that important personage, who received him with a frigidity that went far to bring him down to the common level of every-day life. When, with some stammering and faltering, the watchmaker had made known his business, the manner of his worship became more gracious. He questioned Linkhorn sharply, after allowing him a few moments to collect his scattered wits.

"You witnessed the robbery at Hounslow?"

"Yes, your lordship."

"It was a very bold affair," observed Sir John Lawrence, who was at that time Lord Mayor of London.

"Saving your worship's presence, I never see anything so werry wonderful!"

Kyte ducked his head in profound reverence to the greatness before which he stood.

"It was a development, your lordship. Life of my body! he was such a elegant gentleman! 'Twould a done your worship good to have heard him. His voice was as soft as a cooin' dove's, when he clapped his pistols to their 'eads, and said: 'Sorry to trouble ye, my lords!'"

"It was very fine, no doubt," said Sir John, dryly. "How many of you looked on and saw this transaction?"

"Three of us, my lord."

"And you suffered him to ride away unmolested! Do you know I have half a mind to imprison you all for complicity?" Sir John looked sternly at Linkhorn.

"May it please your worship, we had no complicity nor any other kind o' weapons, or it would have gone hard with him. As it was, I seized the poker and a pewter mug, and said: 'Bartholomew Gurther and Christy Kirk, feller me, and let us kill the vicious wagabond!' But not a step would they budge. So, after he had took their purses and watches, and a ring from the cavalier in black, he swung his great body into the saddle, touched his great, black horse with the spur, and broke away like a clap o' thunder."

"You marked well his countenance and person?"

The eyes of Sir John were fixed searching-ly on the watchmaker, who, holding his hat awkwardly in both hands, rested his weight upon one foot, then upon the other, vainly seeking for that ease and shrewdness which seldom failed him in an emergency.

"If I should live to be as old as Methusalem," he said, taxing his ready invention, "I shouldn't forget the robber's face."

A peruked and powdered attendant announced the Duke of Monmouth, who, entering carelessly, made an imperative motion to Sir John not to notice him, but to go on with his official duties. The handsome, and then idolized son of Charles the Second, by Lucy Walters, advanced, and leaned gracefully against a column, not far from Kyte Linkhorn.

"You feel confident, my worthy fellow, that the face and figure of this flying highwayman are permanently fixed in your remembrance? Now what was he like? Give me some general idea of him. Was his complexion lighter or darker than mine? What was the fashion of his nose? Was his mouth large or small—his brows heavy or light? Look at me, my man, and speak without fear!"

"He was dark; you are light, my lord. In comparison to him, your face is like white paper to old parchment. And as to the matter of nose and mouth, there's no more resemblance than a sparrow to a pigeon-hawk. His nose was a big 'un, and his bushy eyebrows gray. And then his hies! Lord bless us, wot hies!"

"What of his eyes?" asked Sir John, biting his lips, not well pleased with some of Linkhorn's comparisons.

"They was the same as if you should light two fires in the barrels of two arquebusses, and have them both leveled dead at you."

Kyte Linkhorn turned toward the Duke of Monmouth, partly from curiosity, partly to note the effect of his striking figure of speech. Somehow it happened that the watchmaker's eyes did not immediately return to Sir John. His gaze took the form of a chronic stare. He changed color; he was by turns red and pale; his whole expression was one of puzzled and embarrassed uncertainty. Wonder and doubt held him mute and unconscious that Sir John was waiting for him to proceed.

"Your grace will pardon this clown," said the mayor. "I dare say he seldom sees royalty so near."

"Certainly, my lord," answered the duke, with a gracious smile. "Your lordship knows that I count myself one of the people." Then to Linkhorn, with a slight wave of the hand: "Go on, my worthy friend; I am much interested in this matter. Your last simile was a happy one. I am sure that I myself could not forget eyes of that description."

"I umbly beg your 'ighness' parding!" stammered the watchmaker. "I didn't think to stan' in this here presence. If I'm agitated, it's because the developments is unexpected, and because—because—"

Linkhorn could get no further with the remaining reason, but stood twirling his hat, scraping and bowing, the impersonation of fear and hesitancy.

"Speak up boldly, man," said his grace, encouragingly, toying with the hilt of his sword. "Be as much at your ease as if at Clerkenwell, making watches. I am by no means a vicious prince."

He laughed lightly, and the great diamond on his breast flashed in Linkhorn's face.

"If I might be permitted," resumed the watchmaker, somewhat assured, "the hies of the highwayman was fiery, and set deep in his 'ead, like them of your grace."

The lord mayor, who had arisen on the entrance of Monmouth, made a warning gesture to Kyte Linkhorn.

"Your grace—" he began.

"Hush, good Sir John!" interposed the duke. "Let him proceed with his descrip-

tion. Perhaps," he added, playfully, "some other of our poor features resembles this famous outlaw!"

"He was a 'andsome man, your 'ighness—a proper 'andsome man! You might, in the world's wonder, find another like him; but you'd have to travel far to light on him. His skin was darker than your grace's; he had the same overhanging fore'ead; but, as I said, his eyebrows was gray, and his nose a big 'un. But I'm sure," added Kyte, adroitly, "that your grace is much the 'andsomer man of the two."

"Do you hear that, my lord?" said Monmouth, good-naturedly. "I'm not certain but I shall some day be hanged for this re-doubtable highwayman."

"Let us hope a better fate is in reserve for your grace," replied Sir John, with a profound obeisance.

"Who knows?—who knows?" murmured the duke, thoughtfully. "Strange indeed are the vicissitudes of fortune."

His countenance grew grave, and during the moment of silence that followed, Linkhorn endeavored to put his mental machinery in order. There was a problem floating dimly in his consciousness that he wished to solve, but could not. He longed for permission to withdraw, that he might think over matters at his leisure, seize hold of the fag ends and broken threads of circumstances, and connect them in a reasonable manner. The day's events had been a series of surprises. He had not only mystified himself, but every one with whom he had come in contact. In pursuit of the phantom of five hundred guineas, he had possibly run his neck into a halter. Unwisely, he had compared the Duke of Monmouth to a highwayman, and was now ready to curse his assinine stupidity.

"Does my similitude to this notable outlaw cease at my eyes?" asked Monmouth, who, having watched the journeyman for that purpose, now got him by the axes of the eyes, and held him with a sort of fascination. There was that in his expression which filled the unguarded watchmaker with secret terror. He took a little time to frame his answer.

"No two persons, your 'ighness, could be more unlike, from the neck downards," he said, pressing a falsehood into his service. "And the more I looks at your grace's face, the less it resembles the highwayman, who hasn't your royalty of expression."

"Retract nothing!" said the duke, tartly. "I am content to look like that bold and really dashing fellow. And if he be caught, he shall not be hanged, if I can help it. He shall escape, because he robbed the—"

Monmouth stopped; he did not complete the sentence.

"He rifled Orloff Shillinglaw and Dare Cutlock right bravely at Hounslow, at the sign of the Barley Mow!" exclaimed Linkhorn, forgetting himself.

"Orloff Shillinglaw and Dare Cutlock!" repeated Monmouth, shrugging his shoulders, and glancing significantly at Sir John. "When great men go masquerading for their diversion, they must expect adventures, haps and mishaps, like common mortals."

"Your grace speaks in riddles," replied Sir John. Then, to the watchmaker: "The Three Dials shall be watched. If this Night-side, or whatever title, he may please to give himself, should return for his watch, it will be pretty much the last thing that he'll have to do with time; for he will go from thence to prison, from prison to trial, from trial to Tyburn. If he be taken, you may rely upon the five hundred guineas. Unless the duke wishes to question you further, you have liberty to withdraw."

"Your lordship," muttered Linkhorn, is werry kind!"

Bowing low to Sir John, and still lower to Monmouth, Kyte Linkhorn backed, with tolerable self-possession, from the presence of these notable personages.

CHAPTER VIII.

LACK BILLSON GIVES "MORE ADVICE."

Kyte Linkhorn gained the street with feelings of relief. His mind, since leaving the Three Dials, had passed through several changes. His wild elation had subsided. The whirl and tumult were gone, leaving confused and dull uncertainty. The phantom of guineas was dim and obscure. To clear his mind and lighten the pressure upon his brain, he

walked about till dark, and still perplexed and unsettled, sauntered into the White Horse. Fixing himself in the darkest corner of the tap-room, with his two elbows braced on a table, and his long, thin face bowed into his palms, he tried to worry out the problem that disturbed him.

Linkhorn was something like a diver, who plunges very deep, and comes up with his hands full of mud. He was thus wallowing and splashing in the waters of his embarrassment, when a voice that he had heard before, addressed him:

"This one advice, hear: Never give the bloo devils the advantage. They're warmints as will floor ye in the course of ewents."

Linkhorn looked up and saw the cropped head and fuddled-up figure of Lack Billson, and acknowledged him by a chopping nod.

"You seem to be down in the walley. Brighten up, my Ticker; brighten up!" Billson rapped cheerfully on the table with his knuckles. "Under the following divisions all troubles come. The loss of your sweetheart; the loss of your walables, and the loss of life. If you've lost your sweetheart, get another; if you've lost your money, there's plenty more on't. But if a covey loses his life, there's an end of deuices and wisdom."

The watchmaker made a little grunt of assent.

"But here you is with life and the world afore ye. This insinuation hear!" The vagrant fetched a chair, and put it down with a great deal of clatter opposite Linkhorn. "W'en the throat is dry there's grief in the eye. A cup of sack brings the spirits back."

The journeyman ordered two bottles of sack.

"Werry good! You are one as can take advice. I 'oped to wisit ye at the Three Dials; but time is money, and a 'onorable wagrant has scarce a hour to spare."

"I should think," said Linkhorn, "that you'd have more time than you know wot to do with."

"Quite the reverse, my Ticker! A wagrant has to see everything as is worth seein'. He runs to the fires and the rows; he visits all the places of diversion, and his business makes it convenient for him to be in crowds. He tends the criminal trials, and sees all the 'angings and the quarterings, not to mention the catchings of the 'eads of kings and queens in baskets. But there's one adwantage: he ain't compelled to go nowheres, a wagrant isn't, except where he dam please."

"Atween a watchmaker and a wagrant the dewelopments is different. A wagrant isn't liable to lose five hundred guineas, and a watchmaker is," said Linkhorn, with an emphatic look and gesture.

"There's the viciousness!" exclaimed Billson, triumphantly. "There's the viciousness o' bein' anything but a wagrant. Did you ever know a wagrant to lose five 'undred guineas? No, you didn't. Nobody didn't."

Mr. Billson puffed his cheeks, and his nose went down between two furrows of flesh, like a turtle's head into its shell.

"How was it, Ticker? Name the adwersity!"

"There's been no partie'lar adwersity, but there's been dewelopments," said Mr. Linkhorn. "I thought I could clap my hands on five hundred guineas; but the guineas, the more I looks at 'em, grows less and less."

The journeyman's voice asked for sympathy and justice.

"The observation is this: The more you looks the less you sees. Again, in this wise: The less you sees the more you looks. Wot you hadn't got you lost."

Lack Billson slid his hand up over his raspy head to clinch these oracular words. The shrewdness of the venture somewhat puzzled the watchmaker.

"In the world's wonder," he said, searching the man's face for the key to the vast storehouse of his wisdom, "one might find the twin of that movement o' yours; but I'd be unwilling to be him as would undertake the job. By wit, or lucky hit, your remarks keep the time o' day to the truth, or thereabouts."

"Peradventure!" said Mr. Billson.

"You've got a spring as tugs your works wether they will or no. But to the guineas, set me back. To them my hands was p'inted. I hadn't 'em, but they was in view. Well, wot is the logic? The logic is, that I went somewhere. While at somewhere, I seen and heard summat that stopped me. With the lord mayor and the duke, something got in

'mong my wheels, and I've got to be wound up before I starts ag'in."

"I pities lords and dooks! The wood is growed as will make the baskets as will catch their 'eads."

"I'd thank somebody," continued Linkhorn, "that has a key, to wind me up. Take me to pieces and see wot's out o' filter!" The watchmaker looked around to see if any one had the tools necessary to that delicate operation.

"Hear this insinuation," said the vagrant, touching his arms. "There was a highwayman mixed up with the guineas."

"You've ticked it out exact. Put your finger on the man wot rides the three horses of three different colors, and look no further. I had that man. In havin' that man I had the guineas; in losin' that man, I lose the guineas. I went up to my lord mayor's. I told him wot I'd lighted on. I lodged information. Wot was the upshot? I seed a face as made all my machinery vibrate. I don't know why that face tilted my balance-wheel, but stun me if it didn't!"

"Wot was the matter with his visage?"

"Smash my dial if I knows! I wish I did. I wish I knew why the sight of James Crofts, the Duke of Monmouth, the king's son, played the devil with my plans. You should seen his 'ties! They looked me through and through; and though his voice was soft as the paw of a cat, I thought I could see the claw of the same. I had a vague idee that the bies threatened me, tellin' me all the while to go home and mind my business, and let robbers and highwaymen alone. Now, w'en the son of a king seems to talk to you in this fashion, there's summat in the wind more than you knows on. He was gracious, the duke was; gracious with his words, but now and then he flashed on me dangerous. I was a fool, and he drawed me out. In describin' the hero of the three horses, I said there was a likeness atween 'em."

"Would you be so good as to let me take the measure of your 'ead? I wants to know wot kind of a basket it will be cottedched in," said Mr. Billson, with mild interest.

"My 'ead," answered Linkhorn, mournfully, "won't never be mixed with the 'eads of kings and queens. I shall go off in some strange way. Nobodyl'll know wot becomes of me, perhaps. Perchance I'll be taken away in my wittles. Or I may be found some mornin' in the street, without vitality. Or I may turn up in a damp and dreadful dungeon beneath the Tower. These is the fancies as come and go."

"There's more to this than you lets on!" Billson blew up his cheeks and tapped them softly when they were fully distended. "Ticker, you're afraid! You're convicted o' summat that is so vague at times, and at times so vivid, that you're in great vexation. Shine out, man; shine out! Flare up out o' the dark."

Kyte Linkhorn shook his head as if he wouldn't do it.

"W'en I says this much to a man, I'm that man's friend. I have a key as'll wind ye. Come with me. Let's go down to St. Giles in the Fields. I'll show ye wot life is, and where a covey can hide away from the wntures and wampyres of the law. You shall be a jolly 'un. This adventure may turn out for your advancement. It may push you to try your hand at wagrancy. Who knows but you may soon come to sleepin' on a board or in a kennel?"

"I was intendin'," said Linkhorn, "to be a family man."

"Won't you be a family man if you goes with us? Won't that family be a large and interestin' family? Beware o' rashness, young man! If you likes to be a jolly 'un, don't marry out o' your station. If you marries one as 'll toddle all day at your heels, as merry as a lark, all right and proper. Wot is it otherwise? Otherwise, it's the reverse. Do you venture to contradict me, Ticker? Isn't the reverse? You're down, ain't ye? Down on your back, with the argument atop ye. Werry well!"

Lack Billson got his short legs under him, and puffed his cheeks at his new friend to such an extent that the latter feared they would burst. He looked like a man who had the best of it, and always meant to have the best of it.

"This advice hear!"

The vagrant's facial bloat went down. His little cranberry eyes twinkled like two bits of

painted glass in the focus of a dark lantern. He threw back his chest till his round epigastrium formed a bow. The dumpy fingers of his right hand stuck out like the rays of a star-fish.

"Scramble out from under that argyment. Settle the score. Adwance nothin' you can't make good. Let the wisage as worrie ye wanish. And lastly, foller your wagrunt. I'll show ye them as owns all the wittles and clothes, and all the houses, all the streets and squares, all Lunnon, and all the world."

He made a graceful pause, threw a glance half-pitying, half-contemptuous around him, and added:

"Everybody is their servants. You works for 'em, and your master works for 'em. The sellers sell and the buyers buy for 'em. The bakers bakes, and the butchers kills for 'em. Likewise the wine-makers makes wine for 'em. Look at the mechanics. At the sailors, also. At the tailors, notwithstanding. At the king and the queen, moreover. All them is perwiders."

"Say you so!" cried Linkhorn. "Upon my soul, I believe you're right. Give me a sight of these merry rogues afore I sleeps. Who cares for Master Mallers? Who cares for watchmakin', 'prentices, and 'scapements, w'en all the world is workin' for 'em! Wot's guineas, and robbers, and dukes? Wot's life unless it's jolly?"

"It's a vapor!" said Billson.

Kyte Linkhorn paid the reckoning, and followed Lack from the White Horse to the Crow's Nest at St. Giles.

CHAPTER IX.

ST. GILES.

The watchmaker went down into the human-slag and slough, the scum and scurf of St. Giles. The Crow's Nest was situated somewhere near Le Lane, in sight of Cock and Pye-Fields and of the gallows, grim and significant, where criminals gave their last spasms of pain to offended law. This rookery must have been in close neighborhood to what is now Monmouth street.

The Crow's Nest was one of those miserable dwellings of the outcast to which no word-painting can do justice. It had a dirty, tumbling look, which Kyte, tipsy as he was, observed. The windows were awry, and the door was awry, and the gambrel roof was awry. Everything was awry. Everything was black, too. The tiles were black; the moss that grew on them was black; and there were black cracks in them through which the rain ran, in wet weather, in black streams. The boards, and casements, and the rafters yawning out at the roof were black; while the straw and rags stuffed into the crevices and broken panes were black.

The watchmaker did not notice these details, only the general blackness and forlornness. There were other rookeries near it quite as razged and black; but, despite their sombre companionship, the Crow's Nest seemed a thing by itself. The first duskiness of night was on it like the shadow of a raven's wing, adding to the murkiness of its dark and phantom outlines.

Lack Billson, standing on some sunken steps, got hold of a rusty iron knocker and thumped away perseveringly. His strokes presently brought a shuffling step, and some hands, and a voice. The hands opened the door, and the voice spoke:

"Who's breakin' the door of an honest woman?"

"It isn't I, Bab Crowfoot, as I doesn't know the woman you speaks of; and not for a hundred pound would I bargain to break the door of sich a one atween this and mornin,'" answered Billson.

"Go away, you beggar!" said Crowfoot.

"It's your own wagrunt!" persisted Billson.

"Come in, then, and don't stan' shilly-shallyin'. What is this? Who do you bring? Why didn't you tell me you wasn't alone?"

"Mistress Crowfoot," returned Lack, "I brings a addition to our numbers. I brings 'un as was born a watchmaker, but 'un who I trusts, by the mercy o' God, 'll die a wagrunt."

"He's weelcome."

"Peradventure!"

"Unless," added Bab Crowfoot, "he has a fool's wit and a blabbin' tongue."

"As for my wit, I have all that was give me; and in the matter o' tongue, it's my

prayer to the blessed saints that it may never run so fast as a woman's, which 'll outstrip any watch in the kingdom," replied Linkhorn, who was full enough of sack to give latitude to his speech.

They were now in the Crow's Nest, and the woman called Bab Crowfoot had shut the door and secured it. The journeyman looked about, expecting to see some of those lucky people for whom the working portion of London were laboring, but saw nothing save bare walls, lighted dimly by a candle carried by the woman. Disappointed in this, he turned his attention to Bab Crowfoot, who appeared, thus far, to be the only representative of the Crow's Nest, and was ugly enough to be the devil's mother. She was of large frame, and her bones took particular pains to stick out wherever there was an articulation or an angle. To tell the truth, Crowfoot had an angular chin, an angular nose, angular cheeks, angular eyes, angular principles, and a screw mouth. Respecting her voice, she was like a fiddle, which, though a small instrument, is capable of a great deal of squeak and screech.

Bab was not so well dressed as many women in London. Each article of her toilet had obviously worn well and a great while, as the frayed and faded warp and woof sufficiently proved. Her clothes hung as closely to her shriveled person as they could for bone.

"Trot along!" said Billson.

Linkhorn heard a hum down below, and followed his conductress to a flight of stairs, up which hot and pestilent air came surning. Descending, he was in the Crow's Nest—the home and resort of those happy people for whom everybody was slaving. It was a bad place; the fact could not be disguised nor put out of sight. The watchmaker was not so befuddled as to be entirely insensible to a thrill of disgust and fear.

In a large, underground room, the ceiling of which was so low that Linkhorn had to take off his hat to stand erect, were gathered, in ragged conclave, about fifty persons of both sexes; as miserable a company to look at as could be found anywhere, but as merry as crickets.

"This scene survey!" said Mr. Billson, stretching out his short arms, like one in the act of bestowing a benediction.

"I see a good deal of rags and dirt," replied the journeyman.

"Peradventure! But what should you see but rags and dirt? Isn't the nicest clothes to be converted into rags at last? Isn't man and woman to be converted into dust, notwithstanding? You a'n't agoin' to git above your elements, be ye? Look at 'em! Behold! See, also! Observe, moreover! How cheerful is this. Here's women and children, and men and orphans, who have raised theirselves above the wile prejudices o' the vulgar, and snapped their fingers at Care. Wot's riches? Wot's houses and lands? Vanity! Wot's kings and gover'ments? Vanity! Wot's silks and welwets? Vanity! Wot's perfumes and lookin'-glasses? Vanity and vexation!"

"Hear! hear! hear!" cried Bab Crowfoot. A dozen voices shrieked and roared in admiration of the wisdom of Lack Billson.

"Set your tatters agoin'! Fall to with your feet! Be blithe, my children! You've got nothin' on your minds, and some of ye hasn't scarcely nothin' on your backs; therefore be gay. Not one of ye is a king. Not one of ye has got to set on a throne. Not one of your 'eads will be cottedched in a basket. Consequently, link to it. Flicker, flame, flare up. Blaze, my coveys, blaze!"

With yells and movements more loose than graceful, the vagrant company began a boisterous dance. Men, women, and children, launched into one common jumble of motion. It seemed to Kyte Linkhorn that he could see nothing but arms and legs. The immediate cause of this human stew was a low-spirited bagpipe, with a drone like a canting parson. This instrument was played by Mr. Ingulphus Hutch—a person about half-full of lead, and of great experience in the wars. Mr. Billson informed the journeyman that there was not, probably, such another fighter in the whole world. "And as for wounds," he added, "you can't put your finger on him anywhere without touchin' a scar. All kinda o' weapons has been jabbed into him. You'll find the p'ints o' swords, the 'eads o' halberds and spears, and the balls o' arquebusses, you'll find in that man. The stories that he can tell of the wars o' Cromwell!"

Seeing a stool, Linkhorn sat down on it.

"Set!" said Bab Crowfoot. "And may you be happier than one who hasn't slept for forty year."

The journeyman looked for that wretched being.

"She!" said the vagrant, plunging his finger at Bab. "She!"

"Stun me if 'tisn't odd!" muttered Kyte.

"Werry hodd!" said Billson, cocking his eye.

"Forty year," added Bab, reflectively, "is a long time to go without sleep."

"Too long!" said Kyte.

"Forty year, if it's a day! May you never live to keep awake so long." Bab fetched a deep sigh from the lower regions. Her sighs had the sound of coming from a great distance.

"Why don't you go right to bed?" asked Kyte, a little anxiously.

"What's the good? If a body can't close her eyes in slumber arter goin' to bed, what's the difference between settin', layin', and stan'-in'? But I ain't without my comforts. I smokes a pipe; I takes a cup o' tea; I keeps the Nest tidy, and my 'eart is gladdened by a sight like this. There's only one other drawback, which is the law. What a world it would 'a' been if law had been kept out on't! It's the law I've been thinkin' on these forty year, layin' awake nights, a turnin' and tossin' on my bed."

Bab emitted a hollow moan, then pointing to the beggarly crew, added:

"See my ducks! See my doves! See my ground-sparrows! What a sight it is! But I must give this nice lad somethin' to take." She nodded at Linkhorn, and he was the 'nice lad.' "For a wonder, Lack, you've brought us no fool. So he wants to jine our lambs? So he wants to be one o' the real masters o' the land? So he has looked into the millstone. Won't he be a merry one, though? Won't he make the lassies' 'earts ache? O my, my, my! What a rogue, what a rascal, what a knave it is!" Crowfoot laughed a little thin laugh, that had all it could do to get up to, and out of, her screw mouth. "What pleasures and delights and enjoyments is afore us all. May you be blither than one as as hasn't slept for forty year!"

Bab Crowfoot started off to obtain the drink she had spoken of, and Billson followed her. Linkhorn noticed them conferring together in a corner.

The uncouth riot of limbs and voices went on, gathering violence and wildness with the heat of exercise. The long, uncombed locks of women floated like streamers in the sweltering air. There was a festering stream of garlic, ale, and perspiring bodies. There was a swirl of rags, and filth, and nakedness. The chatter of children, the giggling of girls, the cackling of harpies, and the shouts of men, mingled in barbaric chorus. The bagpipe wailed and shrieked with increasing vehemence, responsive to the vigorous arm and sprightly fingers of Ingulphus Hutch.

Linkhorn sat with open mouth, dumb with wonder. Some one came to him; he didn't know whom; he didn't look to see. He was following the whirling, swimming mass—the vulgar fractions of humanity. He heard his name spoken in his ear, then turned with a spasm of surprise, to see, not one that he knew, but the face of a strange, unwashed youth, who was gaping with all his might at the dancers, unmindful of him, apparently, as if he had been at the Three Dials, bending over his little shelf. Kyte, having inspected inquisitively the unknown countenance, sent his regards searching in other quarters for an explanation of the phenomenon which had startled him.

"Escape from this place, if possible! You are in danger!"

These words he heard distinctly, and there was now no doubt as to their origin; they came from the youth beside him, and made the poor journeyman shake with apprehension. He was more afraid because the nature of the peril was hidden from him. The walls, the dancers, and everything around him, instantly became objects of dread. Gone was his inward quietude; dispelled at one swoop his careless ease.

"Wot is it?"

It was a brief inquiry, but put in a tone that made it emphatic. The unwashed face was fixed with dull apathy upon the vagrant revellers; it appeared to sense nothing save

the swirl of legs and arms. But anon his lips moved.

"Don't draw attention to me! Look at the whirlpool of rags when you speak. These people are as suspicious as degraded; as malignant as they are vile. Their daggers will fly out at the first sign of treachery in one of their number."

A cold sensation crept from Linkhorn's feet to his stomach; for it is the stomach that first responds to terror. He began to warn home his scattered senses.

"Who are you, and how do you know me?" he asked.

The youth threw his body slightly forward, and whispered:

"Moll Pool!"

"Life of my body!" muttered Linkhorn.

"Be discreet! If you betray me we are both lost. Those wretches would rend us limb from limb. We should be trodden beneath their frantic feet. Are you cunning enough to frame an excuse to get out of the Crow's Nest? Bab Crowfoot will be back soon. Drink as little of the mixture she will give you as possible; spill it in your bosom or on the floor. Feign intoxication. Swear you will live and die with 'em. Cut capers with the maddest. Vow that you will rob Primus Mallows and divide the swag."

Moll Pool began to float with her hands and arms, and pirouette. Snapping her fingers, and swaying her head, she came back to the watchmaker in a moment.

"Good Moll! sweet Moll! For God's sake don't leave me!" he entreated.

"Be a man, and keep your wits about you," said Moll, dancing around him. "Come! up and set off with me."

Faint at stomach, Linkhorn arose, and Glasspool, seizing him by the shoulders, plunged with him into the rushing vortex. "To it, my gull, to it!" she cried. "In with your walkers and chase the music. After it! after it! Here it goes—this way and that way. Stump it! stump it!"

The thud of feet made the Crow's Nest shake. The clapping of hands, the snapping of fingers, and the dull roar of voices floating on the screech of the bagpipe, together with brandished arms and half-naked figures, lent a weirdness to the scene, strange and indescribable.

Linkhorn's heart was in his throat, and he fancied he could taste it as it pushed and swelled in his larynx. The reek and fetor oozed out in a poisonous stream.

"See my ducks, my doves, my chipmunks!" squeaked Mrs. Crowfoot, in an ecstasy of innocent exultation. "What a delight it is to one which hasn't slept for forty year! To one which has laid awake through the watches of the dismalcholly night, a thinkin' of the law and them which made the law, and them which, for the makin' of the law, oughter be hung by it; hung in chains on a gallus higher'n Haiman hung, when Mordeky sot in the king's gate."

"The above insinuation hear!" admonished Billson, lifting on high an impressive finger. With the raising of that finger the bagpipe was squelched; it died with a hollow quackle, suggestive of a throttled goose. The moment the thing expired, Ingulphus Hutch made a dive at the new candidate for vagrancy, begged the honor of drinking with him, and wanted to know if he had ever been in battle.

Ingulphus was terribly behacked and be-slitted. Scars on his face lay in groups, and crossed each other at every conceivable angle. Mr. Hutch said they were received in honorable warfare, every one of them. His visage, on that account, and some others, was not handsome. His mouth was in the pattern of a half-moon, with the concave side toward the nose. The corners of said mouth running toward the eyes, was an unhappy application of a new principle in the construction of a face. His garments were the decimal fractions of military reminiscences. The lace on his doublet and coat was a good deal shredded, and the faded fabrics presented gaping wounds made by the cruel thrusts of Time. By reason of injuries in his chest, Ingulphus spoke in whispers. But such whispers! They were as cutting as a sabre. They went through the air like a ball from an arquebus. There was no escaping those whispers. The roar of a lion could not have been more distinct.

Gestures went with those whispers; gestures that were yoke-fellows for them.

To the grim warrior's inquiry, Kyte was obliged to confess that he had never been in an actual battle.

"I'm sorry," whispered Ingulphus. "It's a great thing to been in battle. I's born in battle. My mother was a vivandiere. She was taken in travail with her canteen at the lips of a dead soger. My first suit was the colors of the regiment, in which I was rolled up. My first sleep was on a knapsack, with a broken drum sot over me. Bab Crowfoot, you old trot, where's your ale? Don't you see this gen'leman and I is a waitin' for it?" Hutch looked at Bab, and the scars on his face twitched. Kyte was at a loss to know whether there was a secret understanding between them. "Bring us a ugly mug apiece." Then to Kyte: "I've been stabbed and jabbed. Give me your finger."

Ingulphus grabbed Linkhorn's right forefinger and carried it directly to his head, where he rubbed it to and fro on a horizontal ridgepole of bone. When he had fully impressed Linkhorn with the absolute certainty of said phenomenon, he looked at him with benign pity, and whispered:

"Broadsword!"

The effect was thrilling on those who heard it. The broadswod, with nods of approval, went through the company. It seemed a good thing to be ridgepoled with a broadsword. There was a glitter of mild triumph in Ingulphus' eyes.

Linkhorn had scarcely got his mug to his lips, when the bagpiper pounced on the other hand, and rubbed the fingers on his chest, just below the collar-bone. There was a slight prominence of the skin.

"Bullet!" hissed Ingulphus.

The announcement was well received.

"Full of lead!" he added. He spoke like one conscious of his own deservings, but without the heart to set himself above his fellows. He wished it to be felt, that he could deliver a profound aphorism without pride; had been cut to pieces, and shot to pieces, and yet mingled with all present on equal terms. He swallowed half his ale, placed the mug on the floor, and pushed up his hose.

"Spear head!" he sibilated, oracularly. "Cut it out myself with a cleaver. Allus does my own cuttin'."

All seemed surprised that he should do his own cutting, although there was not one of them that had not heard the story a dozen times. After their excitement, they looked a very innocent assemblage. Their eyes were frequently fixed on the watchmaker, as if they expected something. Moll, who kept near him, gave him a nudge with her elbow?

"Wot a jolly place is this!" he said, remembering Glasspool's injunctions. "I wish I'd heerd about this afore. I won't go back to the ticker business, I warns ye. Smash my dial if I don't bring ye a windfall! Primus Mallor's is a rich 'un—a werry rich 'un! There's plenty o' swag at the Three Dials for them as has wit enough to git it."

This piece of deceit cost poor Linkhorn a powerful effort. He was shaking all the while in his shoes. He saw Moll make a sly motion toward his pockets; and taking the hint, pulled out what coin he had, and scattered it upon the floor, when it was eagerly scrambled up by the vagrants. This, instead of appeasing them, whetted their rapaciousness. Every one fortunate enough to get a piece of money, spent it for beer, while the others growled, and half-a-dozen ragamuffins, seizing Linkhorn by the shoulders, drew off his coat in a twinkling. He was going to remonstrate, but a glance from Moll Pool checked him.

"A wagrunt," said Billson, "wants none o' the superflivities o' life. He wants to fare no better nor his brethren. He's satisfied to divide his goods among 'em, even to his coat and doublet, if they happens to be of a salable character. He aspires to git into rags as soon as possible arter he's made up his mind to jine the jolly 'uns. Don't be in a hurry, my coveys. Keep wot you've got, but take no more, lest my frien' Ticker should be led to the conviction that we're cormorants. You've got doublet and coat, and nothin' more shall you have, except his trunk-hose, his shoe-buckles, and his hat."

The watchmaker could scarcely comprehend the kindness of his patron, Billson, whose goodness left him nearly as naked as when he came into the world. In fact, the journeyman stood in his shirt, which Lack-

declared, with virtuous indignation, nobody should take from him.

"What a game boy he is!" cried Crowfoot.
"What a broth of a trumper he'll make! One says it which hasn't slept for forty year. One which has laid awake through the still watches."

"Come with me, my infant wagrunt," said Lack, taking Linkhorn by the arm. "I'll invest ye in garments as is convenient for the soft side of a board, or a vacated kennel."

"This," gasped Kyte, "is developments! I didn't expect nothing as would bear no comparison to it in the world's wonder. This 'ere is freedom," he added, with chattering teeth. "This 'ere is wot I calls beginnin' at fust principles. I'm proud to meet ye. I'm in a hurry to git above ground soon's convenient, so's to try a snooze in the gutter."

This was received with shouts of laughter.

"Fall back, my masters," added Billson, dragging the watchmaker away. "fall back, and don't make vanity and vexation of a good thing. So fur, all's in order, and I opes there's not one in the Crow's Nest as would take an advantage. Be content till I brings him back to you enwveloped in virtuous rags, w'en he will be your affectionate pal and brother thief."

Linkhorn suffered himself to be led away like one in a maze. He hardly knew whether the floor was sliding under him, or he was walking over it. He cast a glance behind him to see if he could glean any comfort from Moll; but her face had disappeared in the motley mass. Ingulphus Hutch and Bab Crowfoot came stumping after him.

"Where are we goin'?" faltered Kyte.

The vagrant lifted a trap-door at the extreme end of the room, and descended a ladder. The journeyman hesitated about following but Hutch pushed him from behind, and he made a virtue of necessity. Down went the watchmaker; down into the mysterious depths of the Crow's Nest; down into the darkness, against which the candle in Billson's hand flamed feebly. Kyte sighed for the Three Dials, and cursed the phantom of guineas.

He was on a damp earth floor, and went reeling after his conductor, full of dread. He was not in a state of mind to judge how far he walked, nor how many turns he made. Fear benumbed his faculties. He was conscious only of being on his feet and tottering after Billson through a dim and murky space, and of hearing Hutch whispering at his heels. Of him and Crowfoot he was terribly afraid. He expected to be stricken from behind and dispatched. He stopped presently, and was thrust into a black place. He implored Billson not to leave him there.

"Don't lose your wivacity," replied the vagrant. "Keep up your vigor. Look at rats. A'nt they wagrunts, every one of 'em? Don't they live in holes? You've made a good beginnin', my Ticker. Think of the wisage you see at the mayor's. Think of the five hundred guineas, which you'll have when the man as rides the three horses, the black 'un, the white 'un, and the gray 'un, is pounced on by the vultures and wampyres o' the law."

"The law!" screamed Bab. "The law which I has thought on through the still watches for forty year. The law which them as made it oughter be drawed and quartered, and stuck up on poles in different places. This is the place where there is no law in. You wanted five hundred guineas for the pretty boy. Ho! ho! ho!"

The screw-mouth and angular face, working with spite and hate, was more frightful to the journeyman than all his conceptions of the furies.

A door was closed upon him and bolted. He was alone with nakedness, terror, and darkness. He crouched upon some wet straw, shivering with cold, distracted with doubt and apprehension.

CHAPTER X.

THE DWARF'S WARNING.

"Your father, Mistress Ruby," said Craw Kibbie, "is anxious about the journeyman, who hasn't come back."

"He is very regular in habit. Something has happened to him. He is always here at this hour to look after the shop," replied Ruby, who, with Margaret Gurther, was in her chamber on the evening of the day following Linkhorn's visit to the lord mayor.

"If you please, ma'am," added Kibbie,

"your father thinks he may possibly be at Mandrake's, Spittfields."

"Margaret and I will go there. Bring our cloaks, Kibbie. Jenty Mandrake can give us information about Linkhorn, if any one."

The girls were soon ready and on the way to Shoe Lane, attended by Craw Kibbie. The evening was somewhat advanced, but Ruby Mallows had good courage. She had at first thought of asking Hungerford to accompany her, but abandoned the idea, on reflection, for more reasons than one. His services would be required at the Three Dials, and his absence increase the irritation of her father, who made it a point to fret when his journeyman was gone. It must be privately admitted that Ruby would have been glad of the company of the apprentice.

They were passing Lincoln's Inn Fields, when the dwarf suddenly presented himself. Margaret Gurther, who had never seen this object, clung closely to her cousin and urged precipitate flight, but Ruby had different views of the subject. Although inclined to shrink from him, his former interview had given her a curiosity which she hoped this meeting might, in some degree, satisfy.

"Go back! go back!" he cried, beating the air with his long arms. "What are you here for? Who told you you might come out? You have no business to be walking at night."

"What ungainly creature is this?" asked Margaret.

"Don't vex him! It is an unhappy dwarf. I have seen him before," answered Ruby.

"My name is Grub, Grub, Grub! Fair Meg, don't you wish your name was Grub?"

"He calls me by name!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Name? I know everybody's name. I'm Satan, Satan, Satan! Call me Satan, won't ye? Call me the devil, dear. How's the Barley Mow, Margaret? How is Bartemas? And how is Christy, Christy, Christy? Oh! ho! ho! ho! The color's creepin' up—creepin' in' up, isn't it? I can see it creep, creep!"

The dwarf clapped his hands on the ground and pendulated between them.

"What a wonder!" said Meg.

"Call me devil, dear; call me devil. Craw Kibbie, go away! I'll light on you, Craw Kibbie, if you don't go away."

"I won't! I won't! Stand off, you fright. Come near, and I'll wring your neck!"

Grub rolled toward her on his hands and feet, like a wheel. Kibbie retreated, screaming.

"I'm a vampyre!" screeched Grub. "I suck the blood of girls."

"I'm afraid he'll hurt her," whispered Margaret.

"No, no. His mischief, I think, is harmless; he will but give her a fright."

The dwarf converted his arms and legs into spokes again, and revolved back.

"Oh, you disgusting sea-spider!" cried Kibbie.

"Come a step nearer," retorted Grub, "and I'll throw my arms around your neck, and kiss you."

"Horrid!"

Craw Kibbie fell back a few paces.

"A cavalier in gray, and a cavalier in black!" muttered Grub, for the ears of Ruby and her companion. "So you have given them an assignation at Lincoln's Inn Field's? Shame, my pretties—shame!"

"Nothing can be farther from the truth!" replied Ruby, indignantly.

"It looks like it. Here you are, and there is Craw, Craw, Craw." His voice sounded like the notes of a raven. "Craw, Craw! Didn't I whisper to you of Craw?"

"You malign her. She is the most faithful of girls. She grows in my favor daily," answered Ruby, earnestly.

"A fool, like the rest of your sex!" retorted Grub, angrily. "I thought you were sensible, as well as fair. But one cannot be handsome without being foolish. A pretty face is the sign-board of idiocy. Craw is an imp! But Craw has wit and you haven't!"

Kibbie was edging up, and Grub wheeled at her again with great impetuosity, striking at her feet like a monstrous foot-ball. He threw up his arms to clutch her. She sprang from him in disgust. He was at his former place again in two seconds.

"Run," he said, "and you may avoid them yet."

"Avoid whom?" asked Margaret.
"Cutlock and Shillinglaw."

"I don't care for them," added Margaret.

"Oh, no! You want to see them, I'll be sworn! You are here for that purpose! Shame, again, shame!"

"Spiteful creature!" said Ruby, with flushed face, "we are going to Spittfields, to inquire for Kye Linkhorn, my father's journeyman, who has been gone from the Three Dials since yesterday morning."

"Since yesterday morning?" repeated the dwarf, thoughtfully.

"Yes. He left the shop, laboring under excitement, produced by the reading of a placard, offering five hundred guineas reward to the person or persons instrumental in arresting a highwayman who haunts London and Hounslow Heath."

Grub swung on his hands, and laughed through the gamut of his voice:

"Ho, ho! hi, hi! Here's fun for St. Giles. If the journeyman comes back, you'll see him; if he don't, you won't. Call me devil, dears—call me devil!"

"If you know aught of Linkhorn, I beg of you to tell me," said Ruby, impressed by his words and manner.

"I know nothing, sweets. I'm a crab—a sea-spider—a polypus! Keep back there, Craw!" Then to Ruby: "Why should I spend my short breath in talking? You don't believe me. The Three Dials and the Woman's Head stand opposite." He lowered his voice: "Ajax Bransom is a devil, and Craw is a devil, and you can call me devil. But I am a different kind of devil. They are subtle devils, and I'm a climbin' devil. I am Grub, Grub, Grub! Back, back, back! I come and I go, above and below, and none of you know how I come and I go. Yo-ho! yo-ho!"

"I wish," said Ruby, entreatingly, "that you would speak to the point. I am persuaded that you know something that concerns us. What is it?"

"You won't hear—you won't understand!" he cried, fiercely. "Because my arms are long, my head large, and my legs short, you think I'm a fool. Would you be a fool if your arms reached below your knees? I told you to go home; you scorn to yield obedience to a dwarf. It is now too late. Yonder comes Dare Cutlock and Orloff Shillinglaw. Fine names! Perhaps they are soldiers of fortune! Perhaps nobody lives and nobody dies at the will of one or the other of them! Perhaps there's no Tower in London! Perhaps there's no Whitehall, no King Charles, no river Thames! When next we meet, where will it be? Call me devil, dears. Yo-ho! yo-ho!"

Grub pointed with his long arm, and wheel'd out of sight in a moment.

CHAPTER XI.

BETRAYED.

The girls looked in the direction indicated by the dwarf, and saw two persons approaching them from the Fields.

"To Queen street! to Queen street!" articulated Ruby, hurriedly.

"Nay, my mistress," said Kibbie, running to her. "I am sure there is no danger. That little wretch is a malignant liar! Let us pursue our way as if we owned every inch of London. Who dares interfere with the watchmaker's daughter while walking modestly and staidly the king's highway? God bless him!"

"No one will be so presumptuous!" cried one of the advancing persons, and immediately Dare Cutlock stepped before them.

"Is it thee, my Ruby? Thou art rightly called, being indeed a precious jewel. Among all the jewels of thy father, sweet maiden, there is not one I covet so much."

The young girl had never heard a voice so easy, assured, and courtly—save at the Barley Mow.

"Stand aside, sir, and permit me to pass," she said, perceptibly agitated.

"There is scarcely a look of thine that would not enforce obedience upon Dare Cutlock; but leave thee, I will not. By those faint stars, girl, I love thee!"

"I ask it not—I desire it not. I but ask to be freed from this annoyance. Go, my lord, and make love elsewhere."

"The fair are ever cruel. Is it not so, good Orloff?" said Cutlock.

"I can answer you more definitely when I have heard what this damsel will say to a word I am about to speak," replied Shillinglaw.

"If that word be what I suspect, I will spare you the trouble," interposed Margaret, coldly.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Orloff, "we find here what we seldom discover at the courts of kings—modesty."

"Let us turn back!" whispered Ruby.

"I shall have the rudeness to object," said Cutlock. "You will—you must hear my suit. Listen to one who is able to perform all he promises. Go with me. I will give you love, and ease, and riches. I will make you the envied of your sex."

"I spurn your offer, my lord!"

"Margaret of the Barley Mow," said Shillinglaw, "I say to you what this noble gentleman has said to the watchmaker's daughter. Be not so insensible as she."

"You waste time," answered Margaret, with disdain.

"If you have riches and honors to bestow, noble sirs, give them to those who aspire to such gifts. Our aims are humbler. Let me most positively assure you that you are exposing yourselves to the night-air in vain; that you flatter in vain; that you smile in vain; that in vain you hold out dazzling expectations."

Ruby spoke with grace and dignity. Her value grew incalculably in the estimation of Dare Cutlock. The diamond that he coveted shone resplendently. He bit his lip. A slight blush suffused his cheeks.

"Girl," he replied, "you are infelicitous in your resistance; for I swear to you, that your virtuous opposition but spurs me on."

"Yield!" whispered Craw Kibbie in Ruby's ear. "You say nay to one who cannot be denied."

"Away, temptress!" retorted her mistress. Then to Cutlock: "We are but simple maidens. Love we have not; it is already bestowed. You have wrung from me the confession. If you have wife, or daughter, or sister, in their sacred names I command you to give way!"

She waved a white and authoritative hand. Cutlock seemed staggered.

"It is well said, upon my life! I would to God there were any retreat in evil! But there is not. There is but one path, and that is onward."

"I perceive that you are a man of rank," resumed Ruby. "Prostitute not your talent and greatness. Remember that guilty pleasures are evanescent. Bear in mind that the fruit turns to ashes in the mouth, and repentance is bitter."

"By the king's crown! You are a saint. Before Heaven, I will not lose a saint!"

"We will see! we will see!" cried a voice that thrilled the maidens. An athletic figure, in a mask of white and black, emerged from the shadow of a tree, and unsheathing his sword, planted the point upon the ground before Cutlock. It was Nightshade, the mysterious terror of the road.

For a moment there was a singular tableau on Lincoln's Inn Fields. Cutlock was the first to speak.

"Who dares interpose?" he haughtily demanded.

"I dare!"

"Insolent!" muttered Cutlock.

"I stand here the champion of innocence," answered Nightshade. "My sword is ready, and I will make good my cause with my body. Advance one or both."

"This surpasses my patience!" replied Cutlock, deliberately drawing his weapon. We met before at a disadvantage; but now on different footing."

"Hold!" cried Shillinglaw, much disturbed. "Hold, Sir Robber! You know not the height of your presumption. You know not—"

"Have a care!" interrupted Cutlock. "Betray me not to this daring caitiff."

"My lord! my lord!" stammered Orloff.

"Peace, good Orloff. My sword shall be bulwark and safety. There is but one man in England that knows the use of the weapon better."

"The Duke of Monmouth!" sneered Nightshade.

"You are right; Monmouth is the man," said Cutlock. "Go, sir, go! Save your head till another time. There are five hundred guineas on it. Begone, with your mask of white and black."

"There is but one who can take my head," answered Nightshade, calmly, "and that is the king."

"The common hangman will spare his majesty the trouble," said Shillinglaw.

"Thou liest!"

"The lie to me!" vociferated Shillinglaw. "Stand aside, my lord, and let me punish this audacity."

"I yield my place to no one," returned Cutlock, resolutely. "Villain! prepare to defend your life."

Cutlock planted his left foot behind him, and put himself in a posture of attack.

"Pause one moment, my lord," said Nightshade. "I aim not at your sacred life. I am but the simple champion of these maidens, and intend to do no more than is necessary for their safety. If they are permitted to go in peace, I sheathe my sword."

"I make not terms with a meddler. Orloff, look to the damsels. Robber, have a care of that forfeit body!"

Their weapons met. The clear ring of steel smote the air. In the duskiness the strife commenced and went on with vigor. In the feeble starlight their faces looked grim and stern, as they thrust, and parried, and tried each other's skill. It was not long before Cutlock perceived that he was engaged with an adversary of no ordinary stamp. It was in vain that he endeavored to break his guard, and end the contest with a decisive blow. Nightshade was not to be surprised nor betrayed by the feints and dangerous finesse of steel. He met the assaults of Cutlock with self-possession, and defended his person with ease.

Ruby and Margaret would have taken advantage of this rencontre, and retired to the Three Dials, had not Orloff Shillinglaw prevented their flight.

"The birds must not escape while my lord is shaking the bush," he said. "Since you are costing us so much trouble, it would be unfair to run away."

He placed himself before them, and blew a silver whistle.

The circumstance of blowing the whistle struck them as being so suspicious, that their embarrassment and fears were much increased. Craw Kibbie, with the ostensible purpose of aiding them, pertinaciously, in her seeming paroxysms of terror, placed herself in positions to encumber their movements, throwing her arms now around her mistress, and now around Margaret, giving vent to little cries, and imploring them to keep her from being carried off by the wicked cavaliers. These things were done very adroitly on the part of the maid; so that Ruby was really inclined to the belief that her previous doubt had done her injustice.

Meantime, Dare Cutlock, vexed with the cool play of his antagonist, pressed upon him with more heat, and brought into requisition the master-points of his knowledge; yet with no more success than at the beginning.

While matters were in this position, Dyce Hungerford, the watchmaker's apprentice, reached the spot, bareheaded, out of breath, and with a staff in his hand about the length of a rapier. Taking in the scene at a glance, he ran at Shillinglaw impetuously, dealing him a blow on the head that beat him to the earth.

"Cowards! villains!" he cried. "Cannot the young women of London step into the streets, after nightfall, without being badgered and insulted by dissolute gallants?"

Shillinglaw sprang from the earth, burning with rage.

"Have at you, base clown! How dare you meddle with the sports of gentlemen?"

His sword was out in an instant, and flashing about the head of Hungerford, who, with his staff, withstood the furious onset.

Cutlock and Nightshade paused, and, leaning on their swords, eyed each other inquisitively.

"You have a firm hand and a skillful," said Cutlock. "It seems a thousand pities that such a hero should die by the halter."

"I hope better things, noble sir. There is no hemp seed in the kingdom that will contribute a single sprout for a rope for him of the White and Black," replied Nightshade, with composure.

"Who comes here? A new interruption, by my soul! Orloff is down. Gad's life! That is hard on Orloff. The tide of our love goes roughly! More fighting! A staff to a sword! By my halidom! I believe all the robbers and apprentices in the kingdom have fencing at their fingers' ends! Put up your sword, champion of maidens. Here come

those who will cut the knot of this difficulty."

Ruby and Margaret, being relieved from Shillinglaw by the coming of the apprentice, immediately set off for the Three Dials, but were so embarrassed by the frantic conduct of Craw Kibbie, that they made but indifferent progress. Seeing a lumbering vehicle approaching, drawn by four horses, they broke from the maid, and ran toward it, crying for assistance.

The horses were at once stopped, and a man jumped from the carriage with alacrity.

"Who calls for help?" he demanded.

Then seeing the two girls advancing as fast as they could, he added:

"Help? Fore God, you shall have it! Into the carriage, young women, and fear nothing. Pursued by some insolent gallant, I dare say?"

"Yes," said Ruby, mechanically.

They flew into the vehicle like startled birds, and sank trembling among the cushions.

"Cease to flutter," said the man. "Cease to flutter, my birdies! You are so safe here, that there is but one man in the kingdom can reach you, and that is the king."

He entered the carriage while speaking, and the heavy door was closed by another hand. The horses started at a brisk pace.

"This is a state carriage!" said Ruby, dubiously, passing her hand over the velvet linings.

"So much the better," replied Margaret. "This gentleman may be one who has interest with the king. I am sure his majesty will punish such outrages."

Their protector laughed, and remarked:

"Monarchs are not above the weaknesses of other men."

"Please, my lord, for you must be one in authority, set us down at the Three Dials, at Red Lion street," faltered Ruby.

"The king's business requires haste. On my return, young ladies, my pleasure will be to consult yours. If you can tolerate my poor company for a space, you shall have no reason to complain of discourtesy."

"We are going very fast," said Margaret. "This alarms me!"

"We will go slower, anon. Trust the driver's skill; he is inimitable."

The clumsy vehicle rumbled on. The girls could catch glimpses, through the windows, of houses and streets flying past them. They sat clasping each other's hands, Margaret happy in the thought of escape, and Ruby doubtful.

The rock and roll of the carriage ceased; it stopped. The door was opened.

"Alight!" said their protector.

The girls obeyed with some hesitation, and found themselves standing by the Thames.

"The remainder of our journey will be performed by water," added their unknown friend. "Please descend these steps to the barge."

"That will be pleasant!" exclaimed Margaret, and girlishly ran down the steps into the barge. Ruby, with many misgivings, following. She could not but notice the richness of the barge, its crimson canopy at one end, the costly stuffs which lined it, and the luxuriance of all its appointments. They sat down where they were bidden, and the barge shot off, propelled by two athletic rowers.

"You tremble!" whispered Margaret. "What ails you?"

"This looks like one of the royal barges. Margaret, my cousin, we are betrayed!" she answered, much agitated.

"My heart begins to throb. What will happen?"

"Heaven knows! Notice the fittings of this barge; see these satins and velvets, these gold and silver laces; the gilded carvings; in short, the luxuriance of the whole. This is too royal. Margaret, we are lost! In flying from the leopard, we have rushed into the lion's mouth."

"Blind! blind! I might have seen it before. Look at that man, Ruby."

"Look at him? I cannot look away from him. His bland and smiling face, as the dim light falls on it, strikes me with dread. Why do we shoot shoreward? The Tower! the Tower! We are heading toward the Tower!"

"The Tower of London!" gasped Margaret, ghastly with fear.

"Yes," replied Ruby, "and my heart tells me that it is our destination. We shall enter it by the Traitor's Gate. We are already be-

neath the bridge. It's a bad omen to enter the Tower of London by water."

"Speak to that person. End this uncertainty. See the singular significance upon his lips." The innkeeper's daughter pressed Ruby's arm so hard, that under other circumstances, she would have cried out with pain; but the mind, in states of excitement, deadens the sensibility of the body. The fanatic is sometimes impervious to torture, and terror of moral evil often has the same effect.

"I will; I will address him, let what may come of it. Sir," she raised her voice, and gave him her flushed face, so far as it was visible in the shadow of the Tower and the mistiness of the night, "avow your purpose."

The barge touched the steps of St. Thomas' Tower. Their conductor arose. The spectre of a smile lay quietly on his lips.

"So far as I am concerned, fair ladies. I may say that I have no purpose other than to treat you with consideration."

Two attendants, standing on the stone steps, took hold of the barge and drew it to them horizontally, and held it steady to make landing safe and easy.

"Call us not ladies," answered Ruby. "We are not of the fashionable and titled. Speak us plainly, and to the point. Are we here by accident or by design? If by the first, take us hence, I entreat of you; if by the second, let our distress move you."

The man pointed to the steps.

"Here we leave the barge," he replied. "Permit me to assist you over the side. Our way lies through this gate. Be not alarmed. You are not for the torture nor the block."

"I wish we were!" exclaimed Ruby, indignation mingling with her fear.

Their conductor elevated his brows incredulously.

"It is far easier," he said, with a sneer, "to be something sweeter than a criminal. You maidens, whatever your condition, know well the arts of coquetry. Not a shop-keeper in London knows better how to enhance the price of his wares than your over-modest damsels theirs."

He extended his hand to assist them to the steps; but, scorning it, the girls sprang from the barge unaided.

"Spare me, gentle ones, all that is maudlin. I am sick of sentiment. If wringing of hands could move me, I should be melted every day; if tears could soften, I should be more elastic than water; if the agony of despair could shake my soul, I should be tossed like a cloud in a whirlwind," he answered, with a severe expression of countenance.

"One would think," replied Ruby, shrinking from him, "that you were the infamous Judge Jeffreys himself, whose hardness of heart has passed into a proverb."

"Ho! ho!" he retorted, contracting his face into an angry grimace. "Talk the rabble in that fashion? Dare they presume to criticise their betters? The wretches!"

"Rather say the wretch," returned Ruby, strongly repelled from this sneering and unsympathizing personage.

"He shall be informed of what you say of him," he said, harshly. "As he is hand and glove with the king, you may possibly feel his influence."

"Why should such a monster be in favor with King Charles?" asked Ruby, involuntarily.

The gate of St. Thomas' Tower had swung open.

The man turned on the worn and grimy threshold, and darting a cold and haughty look at Ruby, responded:

"For the best of all reasons: Because he panders to his pleasures."

"God help his majesty!"

They passed on between a dozen arquebusiers, who presented arms. Two link-boys, who stood in two recesses, stepped before them, bearing long torches of tar and pitch.

"Tell me," said Ruby, "your name that I may remember, when I am shamed and it is the wretch that betrayed me to my ruin?"

The man impatiently waved his hand for the link-boys to go faster.

"Mistress! mistress!" he retorted. "You have sharp arrows under your tongue. You have either less wit or more courage than you ought to have. I am one unused to bantering and baiting, and I always have the last word. And such words! Watchmaker's daughter, my words are death!"

"To me," returned Ruby, "your looks are death."

With quick instinct, she had caught an insight into his character, and determined to provoke him to a discovery of his name and rank.

"To kill me, you would not need an axe; your inhuman face would suffice."

"Axe! God's life! Do you take me for the headsman?" he vociferated, white with rage.

"Such was my thought. And to tell the truth, you greatly resemble the prints I have seen of that odious creature."

One of the link-boys smiling at that instant, he threatened to throw him from a window into the moat.

"I am Sir George Jeffreys," he yelled, "Chief Justice of the Court of King's Bench!"

This announcement staggered Ruby like a buffet with a mailed hand. There was not a man in the kingdom whose name had more terror for her. The thought of the Old Bailey, and the terrible scenes daily enacted there. His love of cruelty was well known. He had a monomania for Death. In the halls of so-called justice, his voice was the watchword of fear. His course reeked with tears and blood. Bridewell and the cart's tail, halters and Tyburn, were his pastimes. The soul of the monster had turned to rock.

Margaret felt Ruby trembling and slipping from her arm.

"Courage, darling, courage! We will get the ear of the king, and he will snatch us from this blood-bloat. How I pity the woman who gave birth to such a moral deformity! I had rather be mother to Grub, the dwarf."

"My name is Grub, Grub, Grub!" screeched the very monstrosity whom Margaret had mentioned.

It appeared to the poor girl that the little blot was an imp, with the power of ubiquity. He came along the long, dark passage turning summersets.

"Call me devil, dears; call me devil!"

"Out of the way, toad!" cried Jeffreys.

"Watch a toad and he will swell up as big as an ox," chuckled Grub. "I'll swell, I'll warrant, so that you can't get over me. Toad, toad, toad! I like that. I'll be the biggest in the puddle. Ho-ho! Ho-ho! I don't swim in your puddle, though. You croak at the Old Bailey; I croak at the Tower. Ow! ow! ow!"

The Grub croaked like a toad.

"You'll croak down in the dungeons before long, you lizard, you earwig, you beetle!" menaced Jeffreys.

"Give us more bear-garden and Billingsgate. Go on, go on, go on! Call me bug, worm, louse, mole. You are grub inside, and I'm grub outside. We're both monsters. How d'ye do, brother? Call me brother!"

"I'll call the guard and have you shot from one of the guns in yonder embrasures," said Jeffreys, biting his lips with chagrin.

"You don't sentence folks here. The word of one Charles Stuart has a deal to do with the house-keeping hereabouts. He makes and unmakes judges. He takes off heads in a jiffy. He's a devil of a fellow, this Charles. Oho! Oho!"

Grub sprang at one of the link-boys and caught the link from his hand.

"Come on. Follow, follow, follow!" he cried.

"Beware how you interfere, you long armed blotch!" growled Jeffreys, out of whose reach the dwarf was careful to keep.

"I have orders as well as you. I act under authority. Disobey Gentleman Charles, if you dare! He is stronger here than you at the Old Bailey among thieves, and harlots, and felons."

Jeffreys drew a large and clumsy pistol from beneath his doublet—one of the awkward efforts of the period at that kind of arm—and quivering with passion, cocked it, swearing, with a vulgar oath, that he would make an end of him, if it cost him his high office. Grub held up a ring.

"Before you fire, brother, consider this toy."

Jeffreys, muttering, replaced his weapon.

"If the king has such insects in his service, honorable men will cease to serve him, anon. Ah, my monster! if I could have you but ten minutes at the Old Bailey!"

"You'd give me the scum of the fish-market, and a mention in the records of Tyburn, no doubt. But come on with your pretties. We want delicacies at the Tower. As the king's favorite, I have an interest in these matters. Ha, ha! Ha, ha!"

"Hear this slug! God give me patience! Wenches, we must needs follow him."

During this singular confabulation, the parties had been moving slowly through a time-worn hall in the direction of the White Tower. The grime of the stone floor, the grime of the walls, and the grime of the dark arches, filled the maidens with mysterious dread. The Three Dials and the Barley Mow, Dyce Hungerford and Christy Kirk, and the associations of home and kindred, pressed upon their memories with overwhelming force.

"My name is Grub! Grub! Grab!" chanted the dwarf, swinging his torch fantastically above his head.

The girls clasped each other for support. The damps and the traditions of the Tower were on them. They pondered upon the feet that had walked those passages, that were now dust and ashes, mould and corruption. What to them were the jealousies of kings, the struggles of heroes, and the dying throes of ambition? There was something dearer than all these.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TOWER.

They reached an iron gateway, guarded by two halberdiers. From this Grub turned to the right, and traversing a long corridor, descended some stone steps.

"Are you leading us to the vaults?" asked Ruby, who, having recovered, in a measure, from the first shock of terror, made good use of her eyes. To yield to tears and lamentations, she realized would be of no avail; but to maintain her courage, and cheer her companion, would be wise and prudent.

"Why not to the vaults?" said Jeffreys, with a sinister glance. "What choice can you presume to have? Think you to be entertained less comfortably than at the watchmaker's?"

"I did not address you, Sir George, but yonder type of your soul." Ruby felt that, like the bee captured and held in a relentless hand, she had the privilege of stinging, and would not forego it.

"Young women," he answered, falling back beside them, and depressing his voice, "you have made, this night, an uncompromising enemy."

"Enemy? You are the enemy of the race! I have heard such tales of your ferocity that your friendship would alarm me more than your hate," replied Ruby.

"Be it so!" muttered Jeffreys. "I will endeavor to see you, fair creatures, when you leave this Tower. You will be so humble, that you will thank any tradesman or artisan to take away your reproach. You won't let him step on you, who would afterward lift you up."

As Jeffreys stooped toward the maidens, with the torchlight shimmering on his pale and mocking face, he looked the prophet of evil.

"Say no more!" cried Ruby. "You chill my blood. May Heaven order that we never meet again."

"I know more of you," continued Jeffreys, "than you think. By the authority of one I will not name, I have made inquiries concerning the inmates of the Three Dials, and the Barley Mow. I could mention two maidens who have lovers. I could call those lovers by name. Ah! that brings the color to your cheeks. I have touched a chord that vibrates. Know you where my vengeance will fall?"

"This man is pitiless!" murmured Margaret.

"What think you, Mistress Mallows, of the new apprentice? What hope should you have of him, should he come to the Old Bailey to taste my tender mercies?"

"Grub! Grub! Have we much farther to go?" asked Ruby, shivering.

"We are at our journey's end," answered the dwarf. "With this key I unlock this door. See me do it. Go in! go in! go in!"

"Daughter of the Barley Mow," quoth Jeffreys, maliciously, "there is a rude clown hight Christy Kirk, who has made himself too officious for the pleasure of one who will not take nay for an answer. If he should sometime find his way down into the Rat Dungeon! Such things have happened, and may again. As for Dyce Hungerford"—he fixed his cold and glittering eyes on Ruby—"he is my enemy, and I will pursue him with all the craft and cruelty of which I am capable."

"Perhaps, Sir George," answered Ruby, after a moment's reflection, "I may find means to thwart your intentions."

"To thwart your intentions," repeated Grub. "To thwart your intentions. Hear! hear!"

"Silence, ape!" bellowed Jeffreys.

Once more fastening his freezing eyes on Ruby, he added, with perceptible uneasiness: "You are thinking of the king. Build not your hopes too high in that quarter. I may be hated and feared by the people, but I am needful to his majesty. And now allow me this parting advice: Speak not of me and this singular interview, as you value the safety of your friends and kindred."

The young woman made no answer, but entered the apartment to which Grub pointed.

"Call me devil, dears! Safe, safe, safe! How safe you'll be! Don't be cast down. You are going to set up the business of great ladies. When you're able to give gifts and reward merit, don't forget Grub."

The dwarf clanged back the heavy door, and shot the complaining bolt into the socket. They heard Jeffreys demand the key; Grub cast it upon the floor, and ran away.

Left to themselves, Ruby and Margaret had opportunity to collect their disordered faculties and take notice of their surroundings. Instead of being the occupants of a dismal dungeon, they were in a room of ample size, luxuriously furnished. This circumstance, instead of allaying their fears, increased them, confirming, as it did, those natural instincts which their abduction had aroused.

Seeing a door at one side of the apartment, Margaret opened it, not with any expectation of escape, but half mechanically. It was a bed-chamber, with rich appointments. An exclamation of surprise brought Ruby to her side. Their white hands spontaneously met; they clung to each other as if their only hope was in companionship. Both felt what they dared not utter. That Dyce Hungerford and Christy Kirk mingled with their reflections, there can be no doubt. They thought of the despair and distraction of their lovers, and the vain search that would be made; the long, painful, weary search. The time might speedily come when they would pray that that search would be forever abortive.

They turned from the gilded couch to a further survey of their prison. Both apartments were lighted by iron lamps suspended from the ceiling. There were pictures on the walls. An antique case, in a niche, was filled with books. Several stringed instruments lay in a confused heap in a corner. Wherever they turned their eyes, they beheld evidences of taste and refinement. Margaret, less courageous than her cousin, would have yielded to despondency and passed the time in weeping; but the latter cheered her by every plausible art. To divert her mind, she called her attention to three portraits of women of remarkable beauty. The first, whose loveliness was marvelous, had silken hair that curled around her exquisite head in short ringlets. The sweetness and vivacity of the face, together with the perfection of the neck and bust, made the girls, for a moment, forgetful of themselves.

"In person," said Ruby, "she is faultless. It is Nell Gwynn. I have seen her, and this does her no more than justice. Poor Nell! she accepts her fate."

"But who is this?" Margaret pointed to a second picture, representing a woman fair as a saint, but of a different style of beauty.

"I know not," replied Ruby. "Another unfortunate, doubtless, dazzled by the prestige of a monarch."

"It may be the infamous Lady Castlemaine, whose intimacy with the king is in everybody's mouth," said Margaret.

"I think you are right," said Ruby, with a sigh. "God keep us from such honor!"

While the watchmaker's daughter was speaking, the picture, to their astonishment, began slowly to descend to the floor, and the face of the original, pale and angry, appeared above it. The girls stood motionless with awe and wonder. This tableau lasted but an instant; the wall opened, the picture rolled inward out of sight, and a woman, richly attired, confronted them. She did not speak immediately, but with her superb head erect, flashed upon them witheringly with her magnificent eyes.

"Wantons!" she cried. "Wantons!"

The words seemed to burn her lips, they came forth so hot and scorching.

Ruby and Margaret drew back a little.

"How dare ye come hither?" she added, with a sweep of her jeweled hand.

"Madam! madam!" stammered Ruby.

"Forbear!" hissed the lady. "Presume not to speak to me. Harlot! harlot!"

"'Tis false!" gasped Ruby, with a glow of womanly pride, and a sudden inspiration of face and form that greatly enhanced her beauty.

"This to me, most shameless! How came you here? Who brought you? What bauble have you received in exchange for your virtue?"

An angry sneer curled the lady's lips.

"Hear me, woman!" cried Ruby.

"Hear you? That will not I! I came not to parley with wantons. Bitterly shall you pay for this audacity."

"Before Heaven, lady, I am here by no good-will of my own. My prayer to God is to get away in safety. Woman! woman! I am not what you have called me. Look at us; we are maidens of common degree. We have been shamefully betrayed and brought hither, by whose authority we know not. If you have power to take us hence, we will, in very gratitude, kiss the hem of your robes, and weary the saints with our prayers for your happiness."

The haughty brow and face softened. She was silent a brief space.

"I have but your word for it," she said, presently.

"Put me to any proof you will," implored Ruby. "If you have daughter or sister—"

"Away with sentiment! I hate it. Bah! Do you think I am old enough to have grown daughters? Whom have you seen?"

"Since coming to this miserable place, no one. God avert our seeing any one—except your ladyship, in whom, under Heaven, we put our trust. You have a heart; one so lovely cannot be destitute of feeling. Lady, beautiful lady"—Ruby knelt, and clasped the white, jeweled hand—"have divine pity on two maidens, who desire to preserve that one gift which God has given them."

"What would you have?" asked the lady, in a milder tone.

"Release! release from the Tower, and safety at home. Turn not away; I know you; you have power with the king. You are Lady Castlemaine."

"Silly creature! You deceive me. What right have you to know me? But if what you say be true, I may be inclined to grant your wishes. Have you been honored with courtly wooers of late?"

"No," replied the girl, reflectively. "Thank the saints, we have been free of profligate gallants. Two adventurers, only, have presumed to address us improperly."

"Who were those adventurers?" asked the lady, eagerly.

"Dare Cutlock and Orloff Shillinglaw were the names by which they were called," replied Ruby, watching the countenance of the imperious woman.

"How long since you have seen them?" she demanded.

Ruby related the manner of their meeting at Lincoln's Inn Fields, and what subsequently occurred.

"And have you not connected these cavaliers with the termination of the adventure?"

"Our minds have been so disturbed, your ladyship, that we have not been able to think clearly," Ruby replied.

"You wish me to understand that you are entirely ignorant of the rank of the person or persons by whose authority you were brought to the Tower?"

"I do!" said Ruby, with fervor.

"I am disposed to credit this, improbable as it is. It will be well for you, and those who love you, if it be so."

She searched the countenances of both to see if falsehood lurked in them, but could find nothing save blushing modesty and innocent beauty.

Footsteps were heard echoing in the long passage. Lady Castlemaine listened to them with changing color.

"I will soon test your truthfulness," she said. "You are about to have a visitor. I will hide behind the arras in that room. I shall hear what may be said. If you have deceived me, tremble! If you have declared the truth, in me you will find a friend."

She passed into the bed-chamber, and concealed herself behind the heavy draperies. This was scarcely effected, when the door was

unlocked, and a man, wearing a mask, entered. Having contemplated the girls a moment, he removed the mask, disclosing the features of Dare Cutlock. Knowing that they were not alone, the young women were of good courage.

"Fair maidens," he said, "I'll wager my sword that you scarcely expected to see Dare Cutlock again to-night?"

"A safe wager," answered Ruby; "and I have to add, that I hope we shall be favored with his company no longer than it is agreeable to us."

"Then I flatter myself that I shall not leave you for an hour," responded Cutlock, with a graceful bow.

"On the contrary, sir, you will, in that event, leave us at once; for I assure you that you are most unwelcome."

"Am I then so odious?"

"To us, sir, your presence brings fear and dread. If you have been instrumental in this outrage upon our liberties, I beg of you to repent the injustice, and restore us to our friends. If you do this, I am sure God will reward the action; for I feel confident that, sooner or later, it will reach the ears of the king."

"The king, it is said, has his gallantries. Rely not too much on him. He is a champion in the lists of love."

"The king may have bad counselors; but at heart he is a gracious monarch."

"I will not dispute you, fair Ruby," said Cutlock, laughing, "for I love the king as I love no other man. I know the moods of Charles. There are times, no doubt, when he is magnanimous; but put Beauty before him, and he is as human as I."

"I will not think ill of my sovereign. He loves the queen, although it is rumored that Lady Castlemaine has a strong ascendancy over his mind."

"I'll dispute thee in nothing; not even in the matter of Lady Castlemaine, who is a very charming woman, though her face is scarcely equal to thine."

He approached Ruby for the purpose of taking her hand, but she retreated from him.

"Thou hast youth," he added, "but she has passed the noon of her glory, and is descending into her evening. It were not well that the king should see thee. Simple Dare Cutlock would have little to hope if brought into rivalry with Charles Stuart."

"Your audacity not only shames but angers me!" exclaimed Ruby. "You offer your illicit love to one most scornful of it. I meet your insidious advances with inexpressible disdain. Know, licentious cavalier, that I will not survive dishonor! I will die in defense of my integrity. At the worst, this shall defend me." She drew a dagger from her bosom; it was long, sharp, and polished like a mirror.

Dare Cutlock eyed her an instant, and took two or three turns across the apartment.

"So you reject honor and riches?" he said, musingly.

"I reject everything that is the price of shame!" retorted Ruby, with dignity.

Margaret heard a rustling behind the draperies. Something had made Lady Castlemaine start.

Cutlock drew nearer.

"What," he said, in a whispered voice, "if I come to you in behalf of the king?"

"I should bid you return to his majesty and say: 'The crown of a monarch is Justice; the crown of a maiden is Virtue; and neither are to be bartered.'"

"You are a little moralist," answered Cutlock, uneasily. He addressed Margaret:

"Daughter of the innkeeper, are you, too, over-scrupulous? Shall my friend Orloff sigh in vain?"

"My cousin has spoken my own sentiments; could I add to their force by any expression, I would hasten to do so. I shrink from this unjustifiable aggression of the humanities of life, with abhorrence and indignation. Had you that generosity of soul which should accompany a countenance so noble and a port so courtly, you would throw off at once your unmanly disguise, and no longer seek the destruction of two poor girls far beneath your station, yet above your bribes. Go, sir, and be as royal a gentleman in disposition as you seem in person. Witness our distress; note these tears; hear these sighs. Think of our fathers and our lovers. Picture to yourself

their grief, should we go back to them despoiled and humiliated."

"No more, pretty saint!" interrupted Cutlock. "The citadel that you defend grows more precious in my eyes as you proceed. Resistance sharpens desire, while modesty charms and adorns that which you struggle to retain. Sweet damsels, you will find us inexorable."

"If we cannot move your pity, we can at least baffle your unholy design," interposed Ruby. "We will not be separated."

Cutlock looked serious, and turned to depart.

"Rest in peace till morning," he said. "Let reflection bring complaisance. Be not nicer than court ladies, who scorn not to be wooed and won. I would take you from your low position, and place you in a resplendent circle. Adieu, maidens! May rosy slumbers visit you."

Kissing his hand to Ruby and Margaret, he left their presence, and they heard the key grate in the lock.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DUNGEONS OF THE TOWER.

The young woman stood looking at the door through which their visitor had disappeared, listening to his receding steps. Lady Castlemaine came from behind the draperies, pale and agitated.

"It is the fate of mortals," she said, "not only to be deceived, but to injure the innocent. Your tale was true. Poor fluttering creatures! If pity were the fashion among ladies of rank, I should pity you. But it is not. We butterflies of King Charles live and breathe, smile and flirt, and even profess to love; but compassion for the unfortunate rarely disturbs us. If we gave way to softer emotions, there are reminiscences enough of this Tower to make us weep and tremble." She paused, then added: "So that was Dare Cutlock?" She tossed her head and smiled derisively.

"Yes," said Ruby, impressed by her manner.

"Silly creatures!" she went on. "Are your eyes so dark and brilliant, yet so blind? The king has just left you!"

"The king!" exclaimed the girls, recoiling.

"Charles, of England!" said Lady Castlemaine, with a scarlet flush of the cheeks.

"Charles of England!" repeated Ruby, stricken with amazement. "I suspected him a nobleman, but I looked not so high as the king."

"So you repent your firmness?" cried Lady Castlemaine, almost fiercely.

"No, your ladyship, no! I would not beggar my good name for a thousand kings. I love, lady, I love! Ah! one so charming as your ladyship must know what love is."

"Too well! too well! as all England knows."

"Can you tell me, your ladyship," said Margaret, "who may be this Shillinglaw, the king's friend?"

"I know, girl, who panders to his royal appetite. The Earl of Arlington is the companion of his idle hours and the confidant of his amours. I know that the earl was with the king when he was robbed at Hounslow."

"We are lost, indeed!" sighed Ruby.

"Poor Christy! poor Christy!" sobbed Margaret.

"The king is powerful," observed Lady Castlemaine, watching them inquisitively.

"Over this poor person I, too, am a sovereign," said Ruby, proudly.

"Not so, child; but the young man who loves you. To him you yield the white throne of purity. To the king you can give nothing but the outer husk."

"You, also, are a woman!" exclaimed Ruby, kissing Lady Castlemaine's hand.

"Should I not be?" she answered coldly.

"My cousin meant not to offend," said Margaret.

"There is but one who can save you, and that is not Catherine of Braganza."

"It is your ladyship! I know that you hold the king in your hand," responded Ruby, with earnestness.

"I know not that! I know not that!" she answered, contracting her brows. "Lady Castlemaine has named her noon, and is declining to her night! That I should be so humiliated before the daughters of tradesmen and innkeepers! But I will make Charles wince for it. He shall lose this bonie bouche —

this sweet dish of innocence, of which his lickerish tongue has already an antepast."

She clenched her fingers upon her palms, and set her white teeth together.

"Young women, you shall leave the Tower this night. I will charge myself with your escape."

Ruby and Margaret threw themselves at her feet.

"A myriad of blessings on your dear ladyship!" they cried. "May your high position make you always happy! The prayers of two grateful maidens shall follow you in your sweet libations wherever you go, through the long road of life down to the silence and ashes of the grave."

Lady Castlemaine was moved.

"Forbear, simple ones, forbear! The motive for this action will not pass for the current coin of charity into the treasury of God. Had I your innocence, I doubt if I should not be something better than—that—" She stopped. "I will send a trusty person to conduct you hence. I will follow without question. He will take you from the Tower by a private passage. After escaping this danger, my advice is, that you leave London for a season. It is not often that one escapes from a king; especially a king who has a dissolute court but too willing to gratify his caprices."

"Your counsel shall be faithfully adhered to," Ruby answered.

"Farewell! May your fates be bumber and happier than mine!"

Lady Castlemaine stepped lightly and quickly behind them, touched a spring in the wall, and disappeared. When they turned to look after her, the picture had returned to its place.

The hour was changed into gladness. They embraced each other. Hope lifted them above despair. Rescue was no longer among the impossibilities. They waited for the moment of deliverance, while every distant sound was the signal for a heart-throb of expectation. They watched the wall, thinking to see it open for their flight.

An hour elapsed before any one came; then the door was cautiously unlocked and opened. A figure, masked and cloaked to the feet, entered. He bore in one hand a torch, in the other a bunch of keys. He made a gesture for the girls to follow, and when they had passed into the corridor, closed the door and locked it.

"This way, and tread softly!" he whispered. With these brief words, he turned from the main hall or corridor into a narrow passage, and walked briskly forward. At the end of this passage, he lifted a trap-door by an iron ring, and began to descend. Ruby paused, holding by her companion, then, with a shiver, went on. The steps were wet and slippery; it required some care to tread them safely. The floor to which these steps conducted was of stone, dark and moist. It was a part of the Tower evidently less frequented than that they had left. There was that cold, still breath pervading it that tells one he is underground, below the influences of light and heat.

The cloaked form strode on, his blazing link hissing and sputtering in the damp. Their dismal walk was between a succession of dungeon doors that gave them no cheerful impressions of the place. Leaving these suggestive objects, at length, another trap was raised and another flight of steps, still less inviting, disclosed.

"I'm afraid!" whispered Margaret. "These vaults are very frightful. My confidence in our guide is failing."

Ruby pressed her cousin's arm and drew her toward, although not without misgivings. Mouldering, ancient odors fumed against their nostrils. Pent-up gases rushed in a cold current through the trap, making the torch burn dim and blue. Their guide waved them on with the flickering link.

"Who is he? Who is this silent man?" queried Margaret.

"Let us hope that every step takes us nearer to those that love us," answered Ruby, in an icy whisper.

"I feel your heart beat, Ruby; it throbs fearfully under my hand. Confess that you are chilled with terror!"

"I cannot deny my misgivings. The very stones reek and sweat with horror! The flags beneath us are glairy with tears. Unhappy

ghosts might walk here through the days of their purgatory, flying from each other, and shuddering at these blood-stained portals."

"I heard a moan!" said Margaret.

"From some miserable wretch, suffering for his crimes or misfortunes."

They heard a sneer from their guide, who turned his masked face over his shoulder, as if to mock at their fears.

"Is it much farther?" Margaret, asked timidly.

"This," he replied, unlooking an iron door, "ends your walk for the present."

His voice was cold and ungracious.

"It looks like a dungeon," said Ruby.

"It communicates with the Thames. Enter first, for this passage must be closed as we found it."

"You are sure that you understood her ladyship?" queried Ruby, apprehensively.

"Entirely!" replied the mask, who had stepped back, and kept thrusting into the darkness impatiently with the torch.

"Hold up your link; I will satisfy my doubts before I enter!" said Margaret, firmly.

And relinquishing her cousin's arm, she ran forward and looked through the open door.

Their guide pushed her over the threshold with an exultant laugh, and partly closed the door.

"Fly! fly!" screamed Margaret. "We are deceived! This is Jeffreys!"

"Yes," exclaimed their conductor, tearing off his mask, I am Jeffreys! Ha, ha, ha! Who triumphs now?"

Ruby waited to hear no more, but turning, fled into the darkness with a swiftness inspired by terror. Jeffreys closed the door of the dungeon, hurriedly locked it, and pursued the fair fugitive, who ran blindly and perilously, groping her way through slimy avenues leading she knew not where. Occasionally she saw the gleam of the torch, and heard the voice of Jeffreys, which incited her to additional exertions. Physical inability presently obliged her to stop. She leaned against a wall for support, and finding a door ajar, opened it, and passed through, drawing it together after her.

When she had rested a moment, she groped about with her hands, and soon convinced herself that she was in a dungeon. She stepped on a chain, that rattled with a dreary sound beneath her feet, and upset a stone pitcher which must at some time have contained water for an unfortunate inmate. Overcome with fatigue and emotion, she sank down upon a heap of decaying straw. Just then a fluctuating ray of light fell across a lattice door. She cowered closer to the straw, and an instant later saw Jeffreys go by at a moderate pace, like one who looks carefully for an object that he suspects may be near. As he went on, the gleams which stole through the iron bars revealed to her the rust-eaten chain, the stone pitcher, a broken crucifix, and a worm-eaten missal.

The link swept on, and the transient glare left the cell more intensely dark.

CHAPTER XIV.

NIGHTSHADE.

Ruby Mallows shut her eyes, and covered them with her hands, appalled by the blackness and silence. Hearing footfalls in the passage, she raised her head, expecting to see Jeffreys, but saw no light. The sounds, however, that had called her notice, were still audible, and manifestly drawing nearer; they came also from a direction opposite that by which Jeffreys would naturally return. She knew not whether to regard this as a favorable augury, or a new danger.

The cautious movement of feet gradually approaching her concealment were, under the circumstances, startling, and her apprehensions were greatly and thrillingly increased when the door of the dungeon was pushed open, and some one entered. Ruby sank closer to the wall and the mouldering straw. She hushed her breath, and pressed her hands tightly to her throbbing heart to muffle its beatings. The intruder stood still. It was a man's step, but his form, though so near, was lost in the inky darkness. It was in vain that she strained her powers of vision and taxed her sight; the thick and almost suffocating gloom was impenetrable. Imagination suggested a thousand possibilities. Conjecture ran riot, till it sank reeling and weary in her mind. Should she speak? Should she ad-

dress this unseen and unknown presence? Superstition said it might be the unhappy shade of the former occupant of the dungeon, on whose limbs the chain had rusted; who had drank from that pitcher; who had knelt before that broken crucifix; who had read, by fitful torchlight, from that mouldering missal. There were awe and sadness in a flash of thought like this.

She heard his respiration; it was the healthy breathing of a strong man. Could she hear the regular strokes of his heart? She fancied so, but it might have been the red, fluttering little prisoner in her own breast.

There was a dull thud of steps. A long, quivering lance of light darted across the lattice-work. Ruby beheld the pale and trembling harbinger with varied feelings. She felt that some kind of a *dénouement* was at hand. Jeffreys was returning. He came on with frequent haltings and mutterings. He was like the hound off the scent and at fault. His terrible passions, so frequently wrought into fury by the slightest causes, by wordy conflicts with thieves and criminals, and by his own cruel impatience, were now excited to frenzy. He yelled and blasphemed, as he sometimes did at the Old Bailey. He smote the stones with his feet. Ruby thought of a caged beast shaking its chain, and biting the links with wrathful howlings.

The link flamed more vividly, and threw glancing gleams on a dark and motionless form in the dungeon, which suddenly began to separate from the pervading blackness. Ruby saw a hand steal through the lattice of the door, and grasp a bar. The next moment the door was thrown open with such force, that it rolled against the wall with a dull crash, that was echoed through the damp aisles of the vault.

"Stand!" cried an imperative voice. "Stand, on your peril!"

Jeffreys retreated to the wall in amazement, holding his link before him like an arquebus, to keep off the unexpected challenger.

"What means this? Who bids me stand?" he demanded.

"I bid you stand!" said the man who had bounded from the dungeon.

His voice rolled along the subterranean corridors, deep and sonorous.

"I bid you stand. Look at me!"

Sir George Jeffreys did look at him, and so did the watchmaker's daughter. The latter had no difficulty in remembering that she had seen him at Hounslow Heath, and still later, as she believed, at Lincoln's Inn Fields, acting as her champion.

This recognition was most welcome. But her mind immediately went into a flurry of perplexity respecting the manner by which he had gained ingress to the Tower. He still wore the suit of green velvet, and presented the same dark, stern face.

Jeffreys glared fiercely at the bold man.

"What do you want?" he cried.

Nightshade slowly unsheathed his rapier, keeping his eyes firmly on Jeffreys.

"There is a paper, Sir George, in the lining of your doublet that I must have," he said, with entire coolness.

"It's a lie! a lie!" retorted Jeffreys.

"A paper," resumed Nightshade, which I must have at the price of blood, or even life. Sir George Jeffreys, I am not one to take denial. That paper in your doublet, if delivered to the king, would cause the shedding of blood, one drop of which is worth more than all that flows in your base body."

"You are deceived! You are misinformed!" protested Jeffreys, with the torch still thrust forward like a spear.

"Will you surrender it peaceably, or shall I rip it from your doublet with this weapon, when I have passed it through your body, as I am presently going to do?"

"Never! never!" howled Jeffreys, suddenly extinguishing his torch, and attempting to run.

But Nightshade was too much on the alert, to be baffled. He caught him by the throat, and they struggled some moments. During the brief contest, Jeffreys drew the paper from his doublet and cast it from him, resolved to preserve it at any hazard. As fortune would have it, it fell in the dungeon upon Ruby's person, whence it slid to the floor. Instinctively she picked it up, and placed it in her bosom.

Meantime, Nightshade bore down Jeffreys with his great strength, and planting his knees

on his chest, put the point of his rapier at his throat.

"The paper! the paper!" he said, sternly, "or this moment ends your infamous life."

"Willingly will I yield every paper on my person; but I swear to ye that I have not that which you seek. Before cutting my throat, I implore you to search my person. If I move, let it be the signal of my death."

"Clasp your hands over your head, and move them so much as the hundredth part of an inch, and I will stab you to the heart! I know you to be an execrable liar; but this lie, if lie it be, shall be the dearest you ever told. Your life, groveling wretch, is of less account, when weighed with this matter, than the slime beneath you," answered Nightshade, searching Jeffreys' doublet and other garments without success.

"Arise!" he said, commandingly. "There is one condition on which you shall escape. Strip yourself immediately!"

Jeffreys began to demur.

"Don't trifling, dog!" thundered Nightshade. "For one act of treachery, your life is already forfeit to me. Off with coat, doublet, trunk hose, stockings, and shoes. Haste, villain—haste!"

Ruby heard Sir George disrobing, casting his garments from him with suppressed curses. When this reluctant task was concluded, Nightshade grasped him by the wrist.

"My safety requires that you shall not leave the vaults at present. There is a dungeon here in which I will secure you."

Ruby, hearing this, made a hurried and noiseless exit from the cell.

"This is more than you demanded," muttered Jeffreys, gnashing his teeth with rage.

"Thank God that I have not slain you," retorted Nightshade, forcing him into the dungeon, and clanging the door, took a bunch of keys from his side, and at the third trial fitted one to the lock.

"There!" he said, when he had turned the lock. "Solace yourself with that comfort which you delight to give to others. I wish some of the forced visitors to the Old Bailey could have the privilege of holding a torch to this latticed door, and looking on your nakedness and helpless wrath. You man of stocks, and whippings, and cart-tails, and hangings! Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

"Mock on, thou gallows-bird! I hope to God you will come before me some time, when I will give you such a sentence that not two joints of ye shall hang together."

The hero of Hounslow laughed aloud.

"Faith, Sir George! I doubt if I ever stand before your tribunal," he answered. Then, more seriously: "If you should chance to rot where you are, tell the Devil that Nightshade sent ye."

A sound between a shriek and a howl came from the dungeon.

"Gnaw the bars with your teeth, Sir George!" added Nightshade. The latter took a small box from his pocket containing flint, steel, and tinder, struck fire and lighted the extinguished torch.

"It's always best," he said, quietly, "to be provided against these little accidents. Then gathering up Jeffreys' garments, and wishing him a comfortable night's rest, he moved along the passage with them on his arm.

Ruby, who had been watching for his coming, suddenly placed herself before him.

"Good, sir," she cried, "I crave your protection!"

By my allegiance, pretty one, you shall have it!" he replied. "Let me see your face. The watchmaker's daughter, as I live! You will bear witness that I did my best to serve you this night; if, perchance, you knew me through the White and Black."

"You were kind and brave. Your mask did not deceive me. My companion and myself were betrayed and brought hither."

"By whom?"

"I scarcely dare speak his name," said Ruby.

"Nor need you. It was the king."

"And who are you?" asked Ruby, eagerly. "You are not, you cannot be what you seem."

"It is but too well known what I am. I am Nightshade; the terror of children and the gossip of fools."

"You cannot be a base-born robber!" cried Ruby. "Something in your face and deportment gives the lie to the thought."

"Nay, young woman, you but flatter me! Yet, in truth, thy good opinion is pleasant," responded Nightshade, courteously. "But let us move on," he added; "for, to be frank with you, many noble heads are in great peril!"

"You wanted a certain paper?" queried Ruby.

"I did, most sorely; but the arch-villain has been beforehand with me. That damning record is doubtless in possession of the king. I must from these vaults and from London. I know not but all England will be too hot to hold me."

"Calm your fears. I will prove to you that you did not draw your sword to-night for one who is thankless. Yonder traitor threw the coveted paper from him while you struggled with him. It fell at my feet. Here it is."

"God in heaven bless you!" cried Nightshade, snatching the paper and kissing reverently the hand that presented it. "You know not the gift that you bestow on me in this paper."

"I care not to know, sir. I but wish to express to you my gratitude."

"Daughter of the watchmaker!" replied Nightshade, solemnly; "this will save the best blood in England! It is full of gory heads, and among them, Monmouth's."

He unrolled the paper.

"See the names!" he added, in a whisper. "The names of conspirators. See, also, how I destroy the terrible record." He held the paper in the torch till it blazed and gradually turned to ashes. "Now, dear maiden," he said, cheerfully, "I breathe naturally. Monmouth will not sleep in a dungeon to-night, nor in the grave to-morrow night."

"What has one like you to do with Monmouth, and those great names that you have just given to the flames? You are something more than a robber chased by the hounds of justice. The fact of your being here tells me that you have power, or that you are deeply in the confidence of the great. But if in this I am deluded, let me earnestly entreat of you to change your course of life, and give to your country and your God those high qualities which I am sure you possess."

"It is good advice, fair one," said Nightshade, reflectively. "I would it were my destiny to follow it. But it is not. I am like an arrow, that must go whither it is shot by the archer. I may hit the mark, or I may fall short of it."

"If you should fall short of it!" murmured Ruby.

"What a fall! what a fall!" sighed Nightshade, gloomily. He stood a moment silent and absorbed. Ruby would have given much to know the purport of his thoughts, and the dreams that went whirling through his brain. He shook off his abstraction presently, and said, with a sweet smile: "Forgive me, maiden, if I think too much of myself and not enough of thee. Wilt tell me thy tale? Thou hast a tale to tell, I'll warrant. Every one who comes to the Tower of London on compulsion has a tale to tell."

"Since you have trusted me with state secrets, I will not scruple to speak to you the plain truth. You shall hear our adventures," answered Ruby.

"This way, mistress. There is a pit hereabouts, into which I would cast these vile garments. Follow me without fear, for I am your friend."

Having searched several passages, he at length found a deep well penetrating to the knew not what dark depths, and into this he threw Jeffreys' apparel.

Briefly Ruby related what had happened to her in the Tower.

He smiled when she spoke of Lady Castlemaine.

"So she played the king a trick!" he said. "He'll not thank her for her good offices. The lovely lady meant you well; but Jeffreys was a treacherous instrument, and had other views than her wishes. Lead me to your cousin."

Ruby believed that she could easily conduct Nightshade to the place where she had left Margaret; but, on making the trial, was greatly disappointed. She presently became involved in the multiplicity of passages, and perceived, to her alarm, that she could not return to that quarter from which she had fled.

Nightshade attended her patiently, doing his best to sustain her fortitude and soothe her fears. It was in vain that she turned from

arch to arch; it was in vain that she hurried from one silent avenue to another; it was in vain that she paused to consider; memory could not find the pathless trail of her flight. She wrung her hands with anguish, and wildly called the name of Margaret. Echo only answered her voice.

CHAPTER XV.

AJAX AND HIS KEY.

"Put up your sword, Orloff," said Dare Cutlock. "And you, young man"—to Dyce Hungerford—"desist. Perceive you not that the birds have flown? Look you! they are already finding safety in yonder coach."

Shillinglaw and Hungerford drew back and ceased to contend. The latter gazed earnestly after the vehicle which bore the two young women away.

"Sir Robber," added Cutlock, addressing the masked man before him, "for the little good that is in you, I will do you a friendly turn. There are those close at hand who will seize you at the slightest signal from me. But, inasmuch as you have manifested a bold and chivalrous spirit in the defence of those pretty slips of Mother Eve, I give you fair warning."

"Sire," said Nightshade, bowing reverentially, "I thank you!"

"You seem to labor under a strange hallucination," added Cutlock, with a start of surprise.

"Sire, your person is well-known to me. I crave the royal pardon for my presumption. I would not for my life have injured your sacred person. I have crossed swords with your majesty, but had skill given me the advantage, rest assured that steel of mine would never have scathed you."

Nightshade spoke in a low, impressive voice.

"Most courteous highwayman," answered the king, "I do believe thou hast some respect for our person; if so, keep the secret of this disguise, and this nocturnal adventure."

"Of all the noble gentlemen in England, sire, I love your majesty the best. Dare Cutlock shall not be unmasked by me to the detriment of the king of England. I confess that my own audacity must strike you as unparalleled; but do me the justice to believe that I do not act without motives. In robbing the royal person, and meddling with the royal pleasure, I am aware that I have become indebted in the sum of a head, but which I trust, by the mercy of God, will long grace these shoulders."

Nightshade bowed in a courtly manner.

"In the matter of the maidens," replied the king, "I stand rebuked; and as for the robbery, I remit your head. Keep the trifle as a slight memento of the royal clemency; for I am sure that it will give you more content and happiness where it is, than it would me after being clipped by the headsman."

"Gracious liege, your gift is invaluable. I will keep it as long as I live. God save your majesty!"

With a profound obeisance, Nightshade turned and strode swiftly away. The king gazed after his noble figure till it was lost in the gloom.

"A most princely fellow!" he muttered. "I would give a diamond from my crown to know his history. Five hundred guineas on his head, and yet he walks the streets of London!" Then to Hungerford, who had not heard an intelligible word of this conversation: "Young man, why have you assailed my friend? Are the sports of gentlemen to be spoiled by every clown one chances to meet?"

"By no means, sir; by such clowns only as I. When gentlemen forget what is due to themselves and others, it is fitting that their inferiors should teach them manners," answered Dyce, folding his arms, and frowning moodily.

"You take a high tone, young sir!" resumed the king. "I would advise you to be more chary, in future, of both your stick and your tongue."

"Advice which, with your leave, I reject. My stick and my tongue will always be ready in a good cause. I hold it the duty of every one to defend woman, sister, mother, sweetheart, or wife; and with the help of Heaven I will not fail to do so on every occasion that offers, be the aggressor gentle or simple."

Dyce Hungerford looked defiantly at the king. Anger was burning like fire in his heart. He wished to wreak his wrath on some one for what had happened.

"I pardon this language," replied the king, quietly, "because there is manifestly a sweet-heart in this case. Let me tell you, candidly, that you had better run after that carriage; for the maidens have jumped from the frying-pan into the fire."

"By the saints! I believe you have hit upon the truth. We shall meet again, my masters, and sooner or later, this matter shall be settled."

Dyce Hungerford darted away like a madman, and ran as fast as he could, but before he reached Holburn, the vehicle had turned down Chancery Lane; by the time he reached Chancery Lane, it was flying along Fleet street, and he could not even hear the rumbling of the wheels. He ran from street to street, in desperate endeavor to get sight of the coach, but wearied and worried himself for nothing. He retraced his way to Red Lion street in a miserable state of mind. He knew not what tale to tell the watchmaker. He paused opposite the Three Dials, under the sign of the Woman's Head, to take breath and counsel with himself.

While he stood panting, he heard a singular thudding on the stairs, alternately light and loud. A hand touched his wrist; a hand clammy and corpse-like in its feel.

Hungerford looked behind him, and saw the weasand face and awry body of Ajax Bransom. His first impulse was to shake him off and run across the street; for the presence of this unwholesome thing gave him a cold thrill of the nerves, and an involuntary shock.

"Young man," croaked Ajax, "what has happened? You seem hot and distressed."

"It don't concern you!" muttered Hungerford, absently. "You trouble me. Go away!"

"Pardon me," answered Ajax, "for meddling or making with what does not immediately concern me. But, who knows what good may come of frankness? If this is a love-affair, as I suspect, Heaven has sent you here."

Bransom lifted his short leg and dumped it down two or three times, as if he would make so many exclamation-points.

"What has Heaven to do with you? Is this a celestial agency? Are you a sort of St. Peter in Love?" demanded Dyce, sarcastically.

"That is good!" retorted Bransom, chuckling, rubbing his hands. "St. Peter is good. St. Peter holding the key of the flowery courts of Love. Yes, I am Love's St. Peter. I lock and I unlock, I bind and I loose. Ho-ho! He-he!"

The two clammy hands went together, and the short leg made another exclamation-point on the floor. His small eyes danced in his head like two faded fire-flies.

"Come up, young man, come up! My key shall unlock your difficulties. I am as skillful with the heart as with the brush."

With an incredulous sneer on his lips, Hungerford followed Ajax to his hot-bed of art. Drowning men catch at straws. In truth, Dyce cared little where he went. The abduction of Ruby had exercised a stunning influence upon him, and he needed time to recover.

A dim light was burning in the studio. Hungerford drew back in alarm when he beheld the phantom faces simpering at him from every side. He rubbed his brow, and queried if he was not the victim of an ugly dream.

"Stop a moment," said Bransom, "till I light up. You lose half the effect in this dull shimmer."

"Spare yourself the trouble," replied Hungerford. "A glare on these would be horrible. I beg your pardon! I mean that a mild light suits best my mood to-night."

"Ah, I see! Your disturbed state requires soft illuminations, dreamy outlines, and subdued shade. So be it. Be seated. This is my flower-garden. Look around you, and in these living creations of the brush, forget your dead hopes."

"How know you that I have dead hopes?" asked Dyce.

"Your St. Peter knows almost everything. Name something that I don't know. I know you."

"Me!"

"The watchmaker's apprentice; Hungerford, by name; in love with a jewel called Ruby. That is your secret."

"That is possibly a part of it," replied Dyce, coldly.

"True; a part of it. There is more. She is pursued by a court-gallant—one, I'll be

sworn, that has power enough to carry his point."

"It is false!" cried Hungerford. "No one has that power while I live!" He stamped on the floor furiously.

"Moderate your transports," quoth Ajax, wriggling on his seat. "Hear what I'm going to say. The watchmaker's daughter is already beyond your reach. I read that in your downcast spirit."

"She has been treacherously and wickedly carried off," said Hungerford, huskily.

"Lost to you—that is, without the help of St. Peter. I've got a clue, young gentleman—a clue, sir!"

"A clue! You a clue?" repeated Hungerford, with surprise. "By what singular means can you have any knowledge of this transaction?"

"Men must not be judged by what they seem; especially," added the painter, "men of genius. Knowledge is not necessarily limited to one pursuit, however skilled one may be in it."

"Most true!" said Dyce, thinking it best to gratify the vanity of Ajax. "But I pray you not to keep me in suspense. If you can give me information that shall lead to the discovery of the two young women who have been abducted, your reward shall be commensurate to the importance of the service."

"For a watchmaker's 'prentice, that was well said!" replied the painter, dangling his short leg, while the pale light lay spectrally on his cunning face. "Mind you, 'prentice, I have not said that I positively know anything of this business; but I'm a man always ready to oblige an honest fellow. My suspicions point in a certain direction; not to a dead certainty, mind you, yet what I call a pretty strong circumstantial case. Well, the upshot of it is, that my doubts can be dissipated or confirmed. Digest this fact; you are unequally pitted against power. If St. Peter aids you with his key, understand that it will be a dangerous office."

The faded, fire-fly eyes winked very fast, and leered from under their brows at Hungerford. He reminded the young man of a domesticated crow that had been at, or was contemplating mischief. He rather expected to hear him "caw! caw!"

"If paltry gold has any value in the eyes of an artist so signally gifted, I believe I may safely promise you an adequate recompense. Though not rich, I have friends who will aid me in doing you justice. The greater the peril, the greater your deservings."

"In sheer compassion for your youth," replied Ajax, sympathetically, "—for I've had my love-passages myself, I'll warrant ye—I accede to your wishes. I know what the soft passion is. I could name some names, if I had a mind. I've been a devil of a fellow, I'm afraid!"

Hungerford involuntarily glanced at the shapes around him, and observed:

"It is easy to see that you have taste, sir."

Bransom irritated the dead thorn-wreath around the base of his head to make it bristle more knowingly, and was about to reply, when Craw Kibbie came in. This young person was somewhat confused at seeing Hungerford, but her natural confidence could not be long dashed. Before she had time to speak, the painter hastened to the rescue.

"Go away, girl—go away! Do you think I set up nights to paint pictures for the maids of gentlewomen? Come at proper hours, mistress."

"Spare your reproaches, excellent sir," replied Kibbie. "I have come, not to be painted, but to borrow twenty guineas, which, unfortunately, I have need of immediately."

The painter, who had been sitting, lighted on his feet at a bound, and stared at the girl as if she had done him a serious injury.

"My poor, dear mistress," added Craw, beginning to snivel, "has been carried away by some naughty, naughty men, and my heart is nearly broke with grief."

"What's that to me?" snarled Ajax.

"This is a wicked king's reign," continued Craw, growing more moist. "They not only rob our purses, but our virtues."

"Go home with your virtues!" advised the painter, curtly.

"Not till I have the twenty guineas," affirmed Kibbie. "Not till I have the twenty guineas to seek the pretty dear all over the world."

"... crying a little cry and whine from

her mouth, and squeezed a little dampness from her eyes.

"Perhaps you don't perceive, mistress, that I'm not alone?" said Ajax, frowning.

"It makes no manner of difference. I have come for twenty guineas, and twenty guineas I must have."

Craw arose rapidly from the quagmire of her grief. Her voice struck Dyce as being singularly menacing.

"This is the watchmaker's 'prentice," replied Ajax, pointing at Hungerford.

"Tell me some news, Spiderlegs! I shouldn't care if he were two 'prentices. He knows nothing of my dear mistress, and cares less; and his being here, or in any other place, don't in the least affect this matter between you and I. Twenty guineas, Spiderlegs!"

She approached Bransom, and held out her hand.

Hungerford perceived that the painter was purple with anger. Grinding his teeth together, he took some gold pieces from his pocket, and counted twenty guineas upon the extended palm.

"Thanks, generous Ajax!" said Craw, with a smile. "But I know that you have enough, and more than enough, and will soon have more. You shall be my banker. I will borrow of you as I have need." Then to Hungerford: "'Prentice boy, you are a brave fellow for defending Mistress Ruby, and striking down one of those cavaliers with your stick, though let me tell you, it may cost you your life; for it is my opinion that those persons were noblemen in disguise, who won't be slow to avenge a blow so lustily laid on. My advice to you, young man, is to take to your heels; for good actions are never rewarded when they interfere with the pleasures of the great, except by Heaven; and Heaven can reward you as well a hundred miles hence."

"Girl," answered Hungerford, sharply, "your knowledge of this mysterious transaction is to me a matter of surprise and suspicion. I doubt whether you were not an accomplice of the ravishers."

He caught her wrist and held it hard. She submitted passively and quietly.

"I'm not strong, and you can hurt me if you like. I don't think hurting me will do much good, though. I can bear being hurt as well as any girl in London."

She looked up at him without the least anger. "I have no faith in you!" added Hungerford, clutching her wrist still tighter.

"It shows your wisdom," said Kibbie, with composure.

"What are you?" demanded the young man, relinquishing his hold.

"An animal poison," replied Kibbie, with a little jerk of the shoulders. "Take too much of me, and you'll die!"

"Young woman," added Dyce, impressively, "I adjure you to speak the truth!"

"I often speak it," she replied, more seriously. "Perhaps—who knows?—I may sometime speak it to you. If you would hear to reason, you would give up the pursuit of the watchmaker's daughter."

"Never! never!" cried Dyce. "I will not rest till I discover the wretches who have committed this outrage, and punish them."

"It is bravely threatened, but the accomplishment will be less easy. Possibly," she added, laughing, "Spiderlegs will help you. He's an Ajax in more than one sense. See what he has done. Look around this art-rookery. Behold these fragments of beauty! If he is to be believed, here are all the king's mistresses. Those not defrauded of body are shamefully cheated of drapery. Note what a turn of the head is here!"

Craw Kibbie whirled on her heel, tipped over a frail head, and pirouetted from the studio.

"She's a devil! a devil!" muttered Ajax. Then putting on a hat and cloak, and buckling a short sword to his waist, he said to Hungerford: "Come with me!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CRUSHED HAT.

Passing through West Smithfield to Newgate, Ajax led the way along Cheapside, down King William, to Lower Thames street.

It was now late in the evening and quite dark. A dusky gloom and silence rested on the long lines of low houses, pervading the

lanes, courts, and squares. The Thames rolled on with a deep and sullen murmur. Hungerford paused when they reached Great Tower Hill. Thus far he had followed, unquestioning, the limping footsteps of Bransom. He thought it prudent to go no farther blindly.

"I tire of this vagueness," he said. "What one knows, it seems to me, he may speak boldly."

"In love, my brave 'prentice, there is always mystery. Take away the mystery, and love wouldn't be worth seeking. A man may safely keep something to himself," answered Ajax.

"I concede all you say, worthy painter, concerning love and mystery; but that concerns not my present purpose. I wish to act in a rational manner. You are as chary of your secret as a miser of his gold. Got Moneypenny himself could not cling closer to his money-bags than you to your vaunted key," added Hungerford.

"If you have so little interest in the recovery of your sweetheart," replied Ajax, with a sneer, "in Heaven's name let us go back."

"I did not propose to return, but to know whether you are taking me, and what relation this nocturnal walk has to Ruby Mallows and Margaret Gurther. You shall find me bold enough as soon as a thread is put into my hands that I can follow."

The apprentice endeavored to scrutinize the countenance of the artist, and read, if possible, his sincerity or falsehood in it, but saw only the phantom shadows of night flitting fitfully across it.

"When I was a young man," said Bransom, "I allowed nothing to stand in the way of a liaison. I snapped my fingers at danger."

"This is not a liaison," responded Hungerford, coldly.

"If I had time and disposition," resumed Ajax, with a conceited oscillation of his head, "I could tell you a famous tale of an elopement; of an irate father, horses at full speed, mad pursuit, and the fair one in interesting déshabille, just as she escaped from her bed-chamber. Courage, 'prentice! Our days of intrigue, thanks to Cupid, are not yet passed. I know what women are, lad. I can trick the sweet creatures to my liking by praising a turn of the head or a cast of the eye. Says I: 'Madam, I can't paint you without inspiration. There are those, madam, that I can't paint at all. Ah, madam, you will inspire me! An exquisite brow! A delicious throat! An incomparable bust! I'm a woman-man. I may not be equal to your style; but if I fail, there's not an artist in London that can succeed."

Ajax performed his raven laugh on the rickety gamut of his voice, and made three exclamation-points with his abridged leg.

"With that polished pate, that wreath of grey hairs, and that decrepit person, methinks you have somewhat passed the age of gallantry," replied Hungerford, unable to repress his contempt for the sickly egotism and crassness of the painter.

A fierce and venomous expression swept over Bransom's face. His self-love was deeply wounded. Mean souls never forgive a stab at their vanity.

"The young are apt to taunt those a trifle in advance of them on the road of life," he muttered.

"I meant no offence. Have your intrigues and deceive Mrs. Ajax as often as you will; but, in the name of St. Peter, let us to the business in hand."

Bransom hobbled on moodily. He stopped anon. Hungerford beheld before him the Tower of London. They were opposite that gray pile called the Lion's Tower. First, there was a street; then a row of houses, and a high wall against which they abutted; then the moat, black and deep; then various courts and buildings, constituting that ancient and storied agglomeration known for centuries as the Tower of London—a fortress, a prison, and a palace.

The young man gazed at the grim walls with feelings of awe not unmingled with indignation. He could not but remember the many deeds of cruelty perpetrated in that ancient stronghold by a long line of kings and conquerors.

"Come," said Ajax, "we must enter here."

"Why here?" asked Hungerford, who, withdrawing his attention from the more im-

posing turrets of the Tower, found himself standing before a small wooden fabric, with a sunken and overlapping roof.

"If you would find the watchmaker's daughter," replied Bransom, "you must submit to my guidance without question. There is the wall of the Tower; this is Petty Wales. This queer house before us bears the name of the Crushed Hat. It is an humble mug-house, kept by some honest people."

"The Crushed Hat!" repeated the apprentice. "A fitting appellation. Go on; I am with you. Keep faith with me. Deceive me, and my vengeance shall be so instant, that it will be little short of a miracle if you ever return to the Woman's Head!"

"Threatened men live long!" growled Ajax, opening a door and entering the Crushed Hat. On looking about, Hungerford perceived that he was in a long, narrow apartment, teeming with the blended scents of tobacco and ale. At one side of this room was a square opening, with a sort of cage behind it, in which stood a pretty bar-maid, ready to pass from a row of shelves in the rear whatever customers might choose to order in her line. Resting her elbows on the shelf before her, with her dimpled chin in her plump palms, she leveled two black eyes at Hungerford. While the latter was taking note of the surroundings, the rattle of a sword caused him to observe, issuing from a corner, a gayly-dressed youth, who immediately addressed Ajax in a bantering tone.

"By St. Wilfred!" he exclaimed. "Here comes the limner of Red Lion street. How fare you, noble Ajax? I trust all the fair frequenters of the Woman's Head are in good health."

"Avant, you man-woman!" returned Bransom, annoyed.

"Satan will not down at your bidding!" retorted the comely youth. "A house divided against itself cannot stand. What new mischief is afoot?"

"This facetious person," said Ajax to the apprentice, "is Mary Glasspool; most commonly called Moll Pool; and, not unfrequently, the Roaring Girl."

Hearing this announcement, Hungerford regarded the nondescript youth with more interest.

"Oh, he has heard of me, I'll warrant!" laughed Moll.

"I'm obliged to confess that your name is but too familiar to my ears," replied the apprentice.

"Don't be over nice, young man. If I don't complain, you need not. Let the delicacy go for what it'll fetch. There is but a poor market for modesty in London," she replied, promptly. Then, to the painter: "We maids are obliged to change our sex to escape the blandishments of Ajax Bransom. The fellow hath such an artful tongue, that, i'faith, he'll have the fairest of us for models, if we don't have a care!"

Moll Pool laughed a merry, ringing peal, while the artist frowned and winced under her humor.

Just then the door of the Crushed Hat gave ingress to the jolly vagrant of St. Giles. The great clock of the Tower struck the hour of midnight.

"Peace to all as loves peace!" said Billson, striding toward the bar-maid's window.

"I'm merry dry, my princess. Give us a mug, deary; not your own sweet mug, but a ugly mug, with the foam atop. That's it, honey. Wot a nice 'un she is! The lilies o' the walley a'n't equal to her. A health to all in the sound o' my voice!"

Billson drained his mug at a single gasp; and, scraping the foam from his beard with his hand, declared it the best drink in England.

"Who is this?" asked Hungerford, in a low voice.

The ears of the vagrant caught the interrogation.

"It's a good question, and a proper," he hastened to reply, "and one as I'll try to answer without vanity: My father was a wagrunt, and my mother was a wagrunt, and I am a wagrunt. My forefathers was docks, who had their 'eads cotched in baskets for treason. It was a wallable thibg for our family when the royal blood run out, and the wagruncy run in. This, sir, is my ewentful history. Look at it! Turn it over! Contemplate it from warious p'ints! Consider it, moreover!"

Mr. Billson did not forget to blow up his

checks, and eclipse his red nose by two purple puffs of flesh.

"Stop your patter!" said Moll. "Learn, to answer the gentleman without giving the history of the family, every one of whom, I'll be bound, died at Tyburn."

"Gentleman!" echoed Lack, with bland sarcasm. "Where is your gentleman, that's a gentleman more than another gentleman? We're all gentlemen together—the watchmaker's 'prentice, the warmint of the brush, and the Roarin' Girl, into the bargain. Yet the best gentleman of all is a wagrunt. Wot's a king? Wot's a lord? Wot's a dook? Victims! Victims and vanity!"

"Have you ever heard of the White and Black?" asked Moll Pool, eying him sharply.

The vagrant for a moment was nonplussed.

"I've heard the tales of old women. In course. Without doubt. Wot is it? A brave covey, as wears a mask of two colors. Wot else? He's here, and there, and everywhere. Whose business is it? Nobody's, as I knows on, but his'n. This adwice hear: *Let him alone.*"

"How would you like five hundred guineas?" added Glasspool.

"St. Stephen save me from 'em!" exclaimed Lack. "I wants no guineas at that price, and I say woe to him as wants guineas at that price. A man as is in two places at the same time, isn't safe to meddle with. I've knowed him, of my own knowledge, to rob a lady at Tunbridge Wells, and a lord at Lunnon, at the same hour and minute, by the best watches ever made at Clerkenwell."

"I believe not in this," said Hungersford. "It is arrant folly. Sir painter, if you intend to do me the service you promised, let us make no further delay. Why we are here, or what this has to do with the matter, I am at a loss to conceive. If you are trifling with me, let me assure you that I am not the right person to bear it patiently."

Hungersford spoke in whispers. Bransom immediately checked him:

"Be quiet!" he muttered. "We must not excite the suspicions of these people. Moll and the vagrant must be deceived respecting our object in coming hither."

"Excellent Ajax," quoth Moll, "hast thou not an odd shilling to spend in sack? Methinks yonder comely bar-maid would like to finger money of thine."

"Buy thine own sack, thou he, she, it! If I were athirst, I should pay for what would satisfy it."

"Go to, for a churlish fellow! I spoke not for myself, but for this walking gentlemen, who sleeps in kennels, and snatches his food as a dog a bone. Thou art but a lecherous limner, fit only for the meaner part of thy trade. As for skillfulness in thy professed art, God help those that can do no better!"

"Foul-spoken harlot!" mumbled Ajax.

"Rail on, viper! The time will come when your deeds will be manifest. There are eyes on you, Ajax, that can see as far as yours. Remember that, in all your dark plottings and windings. Spiders have been caught in their own webs, and struggled in vain to break the meshes of their trap."

Glasspool jangled her sword, and retreating to a corner, threw herself carelessly upon a settle. The apprentice heard her words with curiosity and doubt. He distrusted more than ever the good faith of the painter. The latter, perceiving that she had made an impression, hastened to weaken her influence.

"An unfortunate creature," he whispered to Hungersford, "whose intellect is disordered. It is seldom that she appears in the proper garb of her sex. Mind her not. Come this way. Good-night, jolly vagrant. May the road afford you a thousand pleasures. Soft be the board, dry the gutter, and wholesome the kennel, whereon and wherein you may rest while on the tramp."

"Peradventure!" said Mr. Billson, and lighted his pipe.

Crossing the tap-room, Ajax opened a door at the extreme end. Hungersford looked over his shoulder, as he followed, and saw Moll Pool make a warning gesture. He was too much in earnest to be diverted from his purpose by an intimation so vague, but resolved to be on his guard.

"Come in," said Ajax, "and have faith in my key. You shall find me such a St. Peter to-night as you never saw before."

"Having begun the adventure, I will not recede," said Hungersford.

"It would be foolish to do so," replied Bransom, securing the door. They were in a smaller room than that they had left. A brawny woman, in a high cap and a short kirtle, sat mumbling over a black-letter book, by a rush-light. She was a masculine creature, with a beard like a man. She did not notice Ajax and the apprentice, but kept at her muttering, following the heavy black characters with her finger.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT BEFELL HUNGERFORD IN THE TOWER.

"This is Dame Wimple," said Ajax. "She's a devotional soul, whose thoughts are but little in this world. The pretty bar-maid is her granddaughter."

Glancing at her harsh, coarse face, Hungersford mentally protested that he could see no family resemblance between grandam and granddaughter. He shrank with secret repugnance from this mumming dame. He wondered what she could have to do with her sought, providing she were indeed the object of Ajax's visit.

"Pious dame," said the painter, "heed us not. Our business is beyond."

"Begone!" exclaimed the woman, in a voice strangely unfeminine. "Trespass not upon my time and place. Ye are welcome to the right of passage, if ye but go quickly. Death is near, time is short, and the journey before me long. I would be ready when the bridegroom cometh. Go, ye worldlings, go!"

Bransom took a link from the wall, and lighted it.

"Still farther?" queried the apprentice.

"What is past is so commonplace, that our journey may be said to be but now begun."

"The Crushed Hat has a wondrous depth," observed Hungersford.

"Yes," replied Ajax, with a significant shrug, "and you'll find it still deeper."

With another inquisitive look at Dame Wimple, the apprentice left the circumscribed limits of her retreat, and was ushered by his limping guide into a compartment yet smaller, lighted neither by grate nor window. It seemed to the young man that they must be beneath the wall of the Tower, or rather in the centre of it.

"You must be hoodwinked," said Bransom, taking from the wall a long fold of cloth, which had evidently been used for such a purpose before.

"I have yielded to you, thus far, implicitly; but I will not be blinded. Keep your bandage for other eyes," replied Hungersford, with resolution.

"Nay, but hoodwinked you must be, or here the adventure ends," persisted the painter.

"Let it end, then; for I will not yield to this singular demand."

"Fool!" croaked Ajax, stamping furiously. "How can I serve you if you are obstinate?"

"You shall not serve me this trick, at least; for if I understand the law of Nature, eyes were made to see with." In looking about the small, black cell—it could scarcely be called a room—Hungersford discovered a rapier, with a basket hilt, lying on the floor. This weapon he immediately secured. His guide beheld the movement with alarm.

"Leave it! leave it!" he said. "This is a peaceful enterprise, and a sword will be but an encumbrance."

"A sword, worthy artist, will do no harm if there be no occasion for its use, and much good, in the event of the reverse. You will find me as perverse about this steel as in the matter of hoodwinking. So go on, most mysterious painter."

Ajax scowled and grimaced venomously; but, after a moment of reflection, answered:

"Have, then, your way, young man. Whatever comes of your headstrong will, blame yourself for it. Our way lies downward."

He stepped on a spring with his crippled foot, and a sliding-door shot backward like a shuttle, leaving a square opening in the floor, revealing to Hungersford a flight of steps. Adown these steps went Ajax, swaying his torch, jerking his limbs, and muttering to himself. On hobbled the imp of the brush. They were in a place so damp that beads of sweat stood on the walls. They entered what appeared to the apprentice a long conduit of masonry. There was a reek of brackish water from various crevices. The thought struck him that they were passing through the moat by a subterranean passage. He did not speak his suspicion, however, to his conductor.

Presently they reached a wider and drier arch, along which Bransom hurried as fast as his infirmities would permit. Occasionally they disturbed colonies of rats, which ran squeaking and bickering into holes and crannies, or swept on before them like the scattered hosts of an army.

Hungersford watched his guide with unceasing vigilance, resolved, on the first proof of treachery, to make him pay a fearful price for it. When this sub-mundane journey had lasted a long time, Bransom arrived at an iron door set in massive stone masonry, and taking some rusty keys from his person, succeeded in opening this barrier. He hitched through, and the apprentice followed, when the iron door was closed.

The young man had endeavored to mark the distance which they traversed, and fix the direction in his mind. If he had not erred in his calculations, he believed that he now stood beneath the Lion's Tower.

"Thou goest on rarely," he remarked. "Shall we not soon get at the kernel of thy knowledge, mighty Ajax?"

"Spare your sarcasm, 'prentice. Condescend not to one whose noble art raises him far above watch-springs and escapements," answered Bransom, curtly.

"I crave your pardon! I should have remembered that you are powerful not only in paint, but in pander."

"What did you say?" asked the lame limner, turning suddenly upon Hungersford.

"Only that I should have borne in mind that you are potent both in paint and love. Where are we, good sir?"

"No matter; where you never were before, I'll be sworn. Look around! Saw you ever such walls? Beheld you ever such strength?"

He looked at Hungersford with the expectation of seeing him profoundly astonished; but a quiet sneer flitted over the young man's face.

"All these arches, and vaulted passages, and columns of stone, are doubtless very grand, strong, and durable; but the daughter of Primus Mallows, at the present moment, interests me infinitely more. Thus far, I have trudged patiently at your heels. I admonish thee, Ajax, that it is almost time to crack the nut and give me the meat of thy mystery."

"You shall soon know more than was in our bargain. But how will you reward me for all my risk and trouble? If you have any gold about you, you had better give it me now."

"Prudence was ever among my virtues," rejoined the apprentice. "There will be time enough to reward you when your work is done. Not a guinea will you get from me till I stand in safety under the sign of the Three Dials. But lest you should think me ungrateful, I will say, that if this nocturnal, subterranean adventure gives me a real clue to the abducted maidens, your recompense shall exceed your expectations."

With a snarl and a stifled execration, the artist turned into one of the underground aisles, and shambled on.

A man issued from a passage at the right, and stopped before Bransom. He bore a torch that burned with a pale white and blue flame. His form was tall and meagre; his apparel, sombre black, fitting closely to his person; his hair, long, straight, and of ebon hue. His brow was broad, his chin sharp, and his whole face singularly pale.

Ajax paused at the sight of this unexpected apparition with unequivocal signs of dismay. The intruder flung aloft his blue-flamed link, and a smile broke over his lips that displayed his long, white teeth.

Bransom recoiled and attempted to speak, but his voice died in his throat with an unintelligible murmur.

"So you have come?" said the dark phantom. "You have come without being sent for. Ho! ho!"

The man laughed strangely down below, as Bransom had heard him on the occasion of his unaccountable visit to the Woman's Head.

"This is friendly! This is reciprocal! I visit you; you visit me. You love heads; I love heads. Shake hands, brother." The man held out a pallid hand. The painter stepped back, waving him away.

"Avaunt! avaunt!" he articulated. "Come not near me."

"Be not churlish, friend Ajax. I, too, am making a collection of heads, but am less partial than you. I take all that come, be

they fair or foul, rich or poor, high or low, man or woman. Thou hast a weakness for beauty; but, in my art, I rise above such distinctions. Ha! ha!"

"Be you man or devil, hinder me not, I charge you!" cried Bransom. My business is urgent."

"Thine is a business that always is urgent," replied the other. "Satan himself is always in a hurry."

"Tell me your name, I adjure you!" answered the painter, driven to desperation by his apprehensions and the delay.

"I am one, brother artist, held in detestation by mankind. Men tremble at the mention of my name. I am a walking horror to humanity."

Ajax crossed himself and muttered a short prayer.

"That's right; that's right, fellow-artist! Men and women are wont to fall to their prayers when they meet me. You have not been so pious in a long time. Wait a moment, and I am sure Heaven will answer you. Ho! ho! ho!"

The man's eyes glittered like steel. His laughter was fierce and mocking.

"Leave me, good devil!" faltered the painter.

"Men call me Leechcraft!" added the grim intruder.

"The headsman!" gasped Ajax. "I did not greatly err in taking you for Satan."

"You should be the last to fear the arch-enemy of mankind," answered Leechcraft. "You have served him long and faithfully, and the devil were but a sorry devil should he give you the go-by at last. But what is your business? Whom bring you here?"

"A watchmaker's prentice, who comes to visit a prisoner confined in one of the dungeons," said Ajax.

"Then I am him you seek. This way, brother. You'll come in a different fashion, one of these days. When I have leisure, I shall be happy to show you my cabinet of heads."

Leechcraft strode on in advance of Ajax, while Hungerford, grasping firmly his rapier, followed. They had walked perhaps a hundred yards, through various labyrinthine windings, when Leechcraft stopped and swung his torch three times around his head in fiery circles. Immediately, six arquebusiers advanced upon the apprentice, who, perceiving that he was betrayed, sprang upon Ajax and seized him by the throat; and it would have fared ill with him, had not the guards laid hands on the apprentice. Seeing that he could do no more, the young man threw the painter from him, and he fell heavily upon the stone floor.

Hungerford was not deficient in personal strength. His muscles were neither soft nor effeminate, but seasoned by exercise. Acting from the impulse that is born of emergency, and enhances all one's physical powers, he shook off his assailant, and planting his back to the wall, menaced the arquebusiers with his rapier.

"Tell me," he demanded, "your purpose, and by whose authority I am set upon?"

"Our purpose will presently be manifest, and our authority is derived from the king," answered a man wearing a sword, and who appeared to have command of the soldiers.

"Having violated no laws, I protest against this violence," replied the young man.

"Your presence in the vaults of the Tower is sufficient to warrant your arrest," returned he who had before spoken. "Guards," he added, "fall back! Level your weapons."

The soldiers obeyed this order.

"You are one of the wardens of the Tower?" queried Hungerford.

"I am. Submit, and your life, for the present, is in no jeopardy; resist, and I order my men to fire."

Dyce threw down his rapier.

"Bring him this way," said the warden, and, preceded by Leechcraft, plunged into one of the obscurest passages. An iron gate was opened anon, and the watchmaker's apprentice was pushed into a dark place and locked in. Ajax, who had gotten upon his unequal legs again, pressed his face between the bars, and cried:

"I am St. Peter, prentice! What do you think of my key? Ho, ho!"

"False knave!" exclaimed Hungerford.

"You're in the Tower of London," added Ajax, tauntingly. "The tower of London is

a rat-trap. You can get in, but you can't get out."

"You'll have broken bones if the trap should not chance to hold me," replied the apprentice.

"Ho! ho!" chuckled Bransom. "It's a trap that holds kings and queens, and it will be a pity if it cannot keep such a paltry prisoner as a watchmaker's prentice. What think Master Mallows will say? You've seen the last of the Three Dials. A pretty love-chase this, which ends in a dungeon, and finally with the art of Leechcraft."

"You hasten to conclusions faster than I care to follow," responded Dyce, with a calmness and indifference that highly exasperated the painter. "Leave me, good dauber, and when next we meet, I trust I shall be magnanimous enough not to take too much advantage of thy bodily infirmities. You have deceived me; but, to confess the truth, I am but little disappointed. Return, amiable Ajax, to thy Miss Browns and thy Miss Blacks, and to the spinning of snares for the taking of the silly, and the overthrow of the feeble. As for me, trouble-not thyself. It is a long journey that has no end, and a long road that has no turn." Then to the headsman: "Friend Leechcraft, I bespeak thy good offices for the painter one of these days. See that you do not mangle him."

"We are brothers in art!" laughed Leechcraft. "Come away, brother—come away."

The tall form of Leechcraft flitted spectral-like from the spot, followed by the arquebusiers and Ajax, who paused occasionally, as long as he could make his voice heard, to scream back to Hungerford something about St. Peter and his key.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RUBY STILL BEFRIENDED.

"I perceive," said Nightshade, when the search for Margaret had continued a considerable time, "that you retain no distinct recollection of the place where you parted with your friend. The passages beneath this Tower are numerous, and calculated to perplex those better acquainted with them than yourself. Should we discover the young woman, it will be by the merest chance."

"Would you leave her to die miserably, in a dungeon?" asked Ruby, reproachfully.

"I have no such intention. I purpose to place you in charge of one both able and willing to protect you; after which I will cause strict examination to be made of these vaults," replied Nightshade.

"I cannot, I will not, leave the Tower until Margaret be found!" exclaimed Ruby.

"Neither shall you; you shall find safety within these very walls. Come with me and have faith."

Though suffering intense anxiety, there was no alternative for the watchmaker's daughter but to follow her mysterious benefactor, in whose promise she placed more reliance than she would have acknowledged. She flitted after him with noiseless steps, glancing now to the right, now to the left, now pausing an instant to listen to some anomalous sound wafted to her ears she knew not from whence. Presently she stopped her conductor by plucking him gently by his cloak, and declaring that she heard voices.

"I confess, Miss Mallows, that I would not willingly meet any one here to-night. I am one, as you know, on whom the ban of society rests heavily. I would attain, if possible, the floor above us unseen by guard or attendant."

Nightshade drew a white and black mask from his bosom, and fastened it upon his face. Ruby remembered having seen him wear the same at Lincoln's Inn Fields, when he defended her from the king.

"The robber of the White and Black," she observed, "is much talked of in London. It seems to me, sir, that these colors should be little shown, least of all here. It is very easy for courage to become audacity."

"Maiden," answered Nightshade, courteously, "the hero of the White and Black differs from those who have gone before him, in his gifts and practices. He does nothing at a venture. His plans are matured. He does not pluck unripe fruit."

"Strange tales are told of him."

"Stranger yet shall be told. Stand close to the wall, Miss Mallows. Who wanders in the vaults at this hour?"

"Remain here, sir, while I go forward and reconnoitre."

Ruby glided past Nightshade, and proceeding about a dozen yards, glanced around autting angle into a long diverging aisle. She saw a tall, gaunt figure, bearing a link, approaching, followed by a lame man. She hastened back to inform Nightshade.

"If there are but two," he said, coolly, "we will go on."

Nightshade moved forward, and in a few moments stood face to face with Leechcraft and Bransom. No sooner did the latter discover him, than he began to pull the headsman by the sleeve, and whisper:

"Look you, Leechcraft; look you! If we are but cunning enough, we can pocket five hundred guineas as easy as you can whip off a head."

"What do you mean?" growled the headsman, stopping, and turning his white face upon the painter.

"This," added Ajax, "is that mysterious and everywhere-present thief of the highway. Mark you not the white and black mask? Speak him fair, and if you have a chance, fell him with your broadsword. But stay! What shadow is that flitting at his heels? It is the watchmaker's daughter, by St. Stephen!"

A ghastly smile curled the lips of Leechcraft. His eyes glittered with a strange and startling light.

"Say you so, brother? Come on boldly, and see what will happen."

Leechcraft stalked on and confronted Nightshade. His long, thin, colorless face thrilled Ruby with fear. It was some time before she could turn her regards from him to Ajax, whom she recognized with undisguised surprise.

"Who haunts the lower regions at this unseasonable time?" demanded Leechcraft.

"One who has the right, the will, and the power to come and go at any hour." Begone, thou blood-blobot!"

"Not so fast, good White and Black! Here is one at my elbow who has special business with you."

Leechcraft laughed and rumbled hoarsely down in his stomach.

"What business has such a reptile with me?" asked Nightshade, laying his hand on his sword.

"His palms have an itching for those same five hundred guineas that the Lord Mayor of London has set upon your head."

Ajax was thunderstruck at this announcement. He sheltered himself behind the headsman, a notable object of terror.

"Off with your head at once, puissant robber, or cast the paltry guineas at his feet."

The headsman went off in another subterranean laugh.

"I protest!" stammered Ajax. "I swear to St. Peter that I was but in jest."

"Leechcraft," said Nightshade, authoritatively, "seize this fellow and cast him into the rat-pit!"

The rat-pit, or well-chamber, was one of the most horrible contrivances among the terrible secrets of the Tower. At high-tide the water of the Thames, flowing into various drains, dislodged thousands of rats and drove them for shelter to this pit, into which great criminals were sometimes thrown, to perish horribly.

At the mention of this pit, Ajax fell on his knees and begged for mercy. He groveled and writhed like a worm on the slimy flags.

"Away with him," added Nightshade, "and return to me without delay."

"To hear is to obey," answered Leechcraft. Clutching Ajax with his right hand, he dragged him away as if he had been a bundle of rags. His wild shrieks came back some moments after the headsman disappeared with him. Ruby would have interceded for him, had not her tongue refused utterance. She leaned against a rusty lattice, gasping and dismayed.

Leechcraft's footsteps had ceased to be heard, before she could articulate a word.

"I know not," she faltered, "what this man's crimes may be, yet I do entreat you to spare him."

"He is a wretch, alike your enemy and mine," replied Nightshade, sternly. "In interceding for him, you speak against your sex."

"Who is this ghastly man who obeys you so implicitly?" she timidly asked.

"Pray, young woman, that you may never have his service. He is the headsman of the Tower."

Ruby shuddered.

Leechcraft came back from his tragic errand as calm as if nothing had happened that was not ordinary.

"Good fellow," said Nightshade, "conduct me to the Purple Chamber by the most secret way. I would confide this young woman to the care of Mrs. Haselrigge."

"Mrs. Haselrigge," repeated Ruby; "I have heard that name in connection with Monmouth's." She blushed at her own boldness.

The headsman smiled.

"Report, fair maiden, says a thousand things, both of dukes and robbers, that have but little truth in them. My time is precious. Hurry on, Leechcraft."

The headsman flourished his torch, and took such strides that it was difficult for Ruby to keep pace. They were soon out of the lower vaults, threading the intricacies above.

"The Purple Chamber," announced Leechcraft, pointing to a door.

"Hold your torch here," said Nightshade. He produced paper and pencil, and hurriedly wrote some lines. Folding the paper, he gave it to Leechcraft, saying.

"Knock, and when the door is opened, give this to the lady who will appear." Then to Ruby: "Your safety is for the present provided for. Fear nothing. Your friend shall be found. Here we part, to meet again some time, no doubt. Good-night!"

With these words and a hasty gesture of adieu, Nightshade hurried away.

CHAPTER XIX.

MARGARET AND THE DWARF.

Margaret Gurther heard the door lock, and saw the light disappear. The suddenness of the transaction bewildered her, and it was some moments before she could realize her situation. The consciousness that she was again betrayed, came upon her with overpowering force. The presence of Ruby had thus far sustained her; but suddenly deprived of this support, she became the prey of innumerable terrors, many of which were imaginary. The darkness, the depths of her immurement, her remoteness from friends, and the ignorance of those friends of her fate, together with the uncertainty that hung over her, were certainly sufficient causes of dismay and apprehension.

She pressed her brow against the cold bars of the door, and her brain swam dizzily. She grasped the rusty lattice with her hands, and put forth her feeble strength; the heavy door responded with scarcely a perceptible tremor and a faint, dull thud of the bolt in the lock. Sinking upon her knees, she suffered her tears to flow unchecked, and audibly invoked the aid of God and the saints.

Gradually she grew more composed; an unnoted heaviness stole upon her senses; it was not sleep, but stupor—a deadening of the sensibilities—a friendly interposition by which careful Nature preserves the equilibrium of the mind, and prevents it from being shattered by sudden shocks.

She knew not how long she remained in that condition; the first thing that reached her semi-consciousness was the voice of Grub, the dwarf, chanting in his varied tones:

"I come and I go,
Above and below,
And no one shall know
How I come and I go.
Yo-ho! yo-ho!"

To Margaret, Grub's vocalization was no longer the croak of a raven, but music most welcome. She called his name: "Grub! Grub!" The subterranean aisles caught the sound and echoed it, and went rumbling away with it till it died in mysterious murmurs in unknown distances.

"Call me devil, dear; call me devil!" replied the dwarf; and, sitting down upon a stone, laughed with all his might. "My name is Grub, Grub, Grub! A hundred voices are crying Grub, Grub, Grub! Ho, ho! I love to hear it. Call on—shriek, roar, bellow, split your throats, ye hoarse devils."

The dwarf shook his torch, and gibbered and howled like an ape, while persistent Echo mouthed it after him fantastically.

"Hear me! hear me!" added Margaret, lifting her voice.

"Hear me! hear me!" mimicked the dwarf, and the vaulted passages said, "Hear me!" till the conjuration was lost in a faint murmur.

"Call me devil—call me devil!" shouted

Grub, who seemed filled with the wildest exultation.

Margaret feared she should not be able to arrest his attention. She thought of an expedient. She pronounced her own name as distinctly as possible:

"Margaret Gurther! Margaret Gurther!"

Innumerable invisible tongues repeated her name. Grub was silent a moment. The name diverted his thoughts to another channel. A suspicion crossed his shrewd, yet eccentric brain.

"Who calls the innkeeper's daughter? Who wants Margaret Gurther? Who wants Meg, Meg, Meg?"

"It is Margaret herself that speaks," answered the young woman.

"Where are you? There are so many devils talking here that I can't fix your voice anywhere."

"This way. Turn half-around and advance," replied Margaret, who could see him a long distance off by the light of his link.

"Now I have you. I'll find you in a minute. What a nice thing it is to be strolling about—to come and to go, above and below, and nobody know, why it is so!"

The dwarf approached the dungeon. Margaret's heart beat high with hope. The little monster stood at the grated door, with the light of his torch thrown across the bars in a red glare.

"Don't you wish you was a dwarf, mistress, with long arms, broad shoulders, and a bloated head?" If you were, you wouldn't be run away with, and nobody would shut you up in dungeons."

"I want most of all things liberty, and a safe return to the Barley Mow," answered Margaret.

"Who brought you here?" asked Grub.

"Jeffreys, who had instructions from Lady Castlemaine to conduct my cousin and myself from the Tower."

"Which he wouldn't do," said Grub. "He's a fine monster, but not a monster to be trusted. Mistress Castlemaine must have been out of her wits when she gave two such lambs to the keeping of a wolf."

"Wolf, indeed! He may return again to carry out his vile designs, and my only hope is in you. Help me, and in your extremity may Heaven help you!"

"Heaven has helped me so much," replied Grub, with a humorous leer, "that I feel backward about calling for further aid. See what arms it has given me; what a body; what a head!" He laughed harshly.

"Think not of your own misfortunes, which cannot be remedied, but of mine, which may. You know the secrets of these vaults; take me hence, and the blessings and prayers of Bartemas Gurther will follow you through life."

"Blessings and prayers," answered Grub, "have never yet followed me; but I don't mind if I have a turn at 'em. Here is the key in the door; I turn it; come out, Meg, come out."

The dwarf opened the door. A new fear seized Margaret. Could she confide in the fidelity of this erratic creature? He noticed her hesitation.

"I'll lock it again, if you like," he said. "Perhaps you'll be safer with the door between us. Ho! ho!"

"I'm not afraid," replied Margaret, doing some violence to truth.

"A lie! a lie!" snarled Grub. "All you fair ones are afraid of me. And why? Because I am three feet high instead of six; because I am not so large a monster as other monsters. What matters the matter of six inches on the length of an arm, or a leg, or in the circumference of a head? Go to! I would not change my corpus with the tallest in the land. It is I that am right, and the world that is wrong. You may scoff and mock, but I am the law, and you the departure from it. Come, come! Keep near me. I will entertain you with wise discourse on the way."

"Where are you leading me?" inquired Margaret, anxiously.

"From the king and his lords, and from the Tower. But mind you, mistress, you must do as I bid you. Obedience is the price of your liberty."

The dwarf ambled on before Margaret, who followed him, hoping for a happy termination of the night's adventures. He traversed the long passages by which Ajax Bransom had

conducted Hungersford to the Tower. There was no indecision in his manner; he appeared to know definitely where he was going. He unlocked the iron door, and hurried along the low, black, horizontal shaft between the Lion's Tower and the moat, and through the moat to the wall, thence to the little room where the painter and the apprentice had found Dame Wimple reading the black-letter book.

"Where are we?" asked Margaret.

"That is a question that I can answer," said Grub, "but there is no need that you should know. Be content to escape. The secrets of the great concern you not. Wait here till I come back."

"I dare not remain here alone."

"Look you, Mistress Margaret!" added the dwarf, cunningly. "I will fix you so that no one will molest you. Here; put on this cloak and hood."

He threw a large faded cloak upon Margaret's shoulders, and reaching up with his long arms, adjusted its deep hood over her face. His nearness, while thus employed, inspired her with a peculiar feeling of repugnance.

"Sit down in this great chair, gather your feet under you upon the round, lean forward like an old woman, and croon and pore over these devil-characters, which are full of meaning for those that can understand the inky lore."

Grub dragged the black-letter book from a shelf, by standing on his toes, and placed it in Margaret's lap.

"Should you be intruded upon," continued the dwarf, "Dame Wimple is the woman you are to personate, though, God save the mark, there is but little likeness between you! Those hands are too fair for the dame's, keep them under the cover of the book. Her voice is masculine, like this." The dwarf gave a ludicrous imitation of Dame Wimple's manner of speech. "Nobody may come to disturb you. I give these hints to help you, should any one chance to pass through the room, or question you."

Margaret mechanically received the book, and assumed the pose indicated by Grub.

"But what am I to do if this Dame Wimple should return?"

When Margaret had waited a suitable time for an answer, she raised her eyes and perceived that her singular friend had disappeared. She glanced around the little cell, awed by the strange stillness, broken only by the monotonous ticking of the clock. A single wick flamed and sputtered in a black iron basin, diffusing a light, weird and sickly. She wondered where she was. She had wandered far in those underground dens, and lost all comprehension of place or direction. The night had been so crowded with incident, that a braver mind than hers might well have been bewildered. All the tales she had ever heard of the Tower, were vividly revived in memory, and were ill calculated to give that quiet and steadiness to her nerves which she needed.

The absence of the dwarf was strangely protracted. She watched the great staring dial and saw it slowly point the minutes—such minutes as no other clock ever made. She tried to divert herself with the black-letter book, but could make no sense of the heavy sentences.

She heard Grub coming at last; he was at the door. No, her convictions had traveled too fast; instead of the dwarf, she beheld a man with a large, red face, broad shoulders, and low of stature, and whom she at once remembered to have seen on several occasions at the Barley Mow. It was Lack Billson, the vagrant.

Margaret drew her hood more closely about her face, and bent lower over the book.

"A werry good creetur you be!" said Lack, blowing up his cheeks. "We won't be able to keep ye long in this wicious world, I'se afear'd. How dewoted you is to the development of your in'ard parts!"

Not knowing what to say, Margaret prudently remained silent.

"You're set, I see, like a trap. Watchin' for somebody, as puss watches for a victim. Don't spring on me, you pious warmint! I shan't touch your trencher, not if I know it. Bus'niss on hand at daylight. A person is to be diwested of his wal'ables, who is now a sleepin' in his bed at the Barley Mow."

Margaret heard the mention of this familiar name with a degree of astonishment that

threatened to destroy the illusion which she thought it necessary to maintain. The proxy of Dame Wimple was in imminent danger of stepping out of her character.

"Come, Master Ferguson, stop mumming over that book. Wot's the use o' wixin' your eyes on them pothooks? You can't deceive me, and no more can you deceive youself. It's only on them as don't know you that you can vaccinate your mischief. With this wagrant you're Bob Ferguson, and no more Dame Wimple than I'm the Queen o' England!"

Margaret Gurther was quick of apprehension, but with all her acuteness, could not clearly understand the last remark of Billson. She was acting the part of Dame Wimple, and suddenly it flashed upon her that Dame Wimple herself was acting a part, and was not a woman. She feared to speak, lest her voice should betray her. But silence would soon become suspicious and dangerous; she therefore said, with as much steadiness as she could assume:

"We will talk of this another time. Leave me!"

Remembering the instructions of Grub, she imitated the lesson he had given her as well as she could.

"This insinuation hear! No time like the present there is. Which observe. Which ponder. Which also lay to heart. By a wagrant be advised. Wot you mean, say; and wot you say, stick to. Yesterday you's for doin' summat on your own account, without regard to him as the five hundred guineas is offered for. To wot you said, listen: 'Arter we've done for the rich 'un, we'll try our hand at the strong box of Bartemas Gurther.' I advanced a different opinion. I said: 'Obey the guv'nor. Take from them that has more nor they needs, and let them alone as gets their bread by hook and by crook. Bartemas,' said I, 'is a honest sort o' body; I've warmed myself by his fire, and cheered my stomach with his sack. He keeps a inn. Sacred is he as keeps a inn, and don't begrudge now and then a crust and a mug to the sore-footed trumper. The rich 'uns, Master Ferguson, the rich 'uns! Them as rides in coaches and has more than they knows how to spend to adwantage!' You said you'd convince me to the contrary, and talk me out of my own convictions. Advance something, Begin your argyment. Convert me, Master Bob, convert me!"

"I've changed my mind, good fellow! I've changed my mind!" exclaimed Margaret, with too much earnestness for the safety of her disguise.

"Wot's here? Wot rewealments is this?" cried Billson, in alarm. He snatched the hood from Margaret's head, and instead of the coarse, masculine face of Dame Wimple, discovered the fair features of the innkeeper's daughter.

"The Virgin save us!" said Mr. Billson. "Here's developments as staggers me. Here's Margaret of the Barley Mow, or of deception I am the victim."

"Yes," replied Margaret, rising, "I am the daughter of Bartemas Gurther."

"Why are you here?" he asked. "Are you, too, in search of five hundred guineas? Did you come to spy out the secrets of the White and black? You'd better staid at home, young ooman. Better be a bar-maid at the Barley Mow than anything you can be here."

"I should be far from this place, if I had my wish," answered Margaret.

"You shouldn't play tricks!" retorted the vagrant. "If you had told me your name afore I let out my secrets, you would found it to your adwantage. It was werry vicious in you to let me go on a diwulging what ought to been kept neath my own weskit."

"I had no evil purpose, I assure you," protested Margaret.

"Excuses is in wain. I'm sorry for you; but wot is done can't be undone. My pretty pigeon, you cannot carry your news abroad."

"You will not have the heart to detain me?" said Margaret, her fears much wrought upon.

"Quite the reverse!" replied Lack, coolly, inflating his face, and smothering his fat nose.

"If you have wife, sweetheart, sister, or mother," began Margaret, pathetically.

"Not one on 'em, peradventure! Not one on 'em, I thanks ye! All is gone. Nothing is left to your wagrant but all the world, which is afore him. Sweethearts, and wives, and mothers is vanity."

Margaret was commencing a touching appeal to his generosity, when Grub re-appeared.

"Hello!" said Lack. "Here comes a head and a pair of arms. Where's the rest of the warmint, I wonder?"

"There's as much of him here as you'll need!" answered the dwarf. "Come, Mistress Margaret."

"Not so fast, my grasshopper!" interposed the vagrant. "This young ooman has business with your werry humble servant."

"I know not what business she can have with a stroller, who has less wit than the foxes that have holes, and the birds of the air that have nests."

Grub cast a scornful glance at Billson.

"You are as impudent a head and arms as I ever see. Begone, or I shall do you a violence!"

"Be careful what you do!" shrieked Grub. "Make me your enemy, and you'll be sorry to the last day of your life. You may puff your cheeks, smother your nose, and rub your cropped head, but that won't make the truth a lie."

"Wot a bantam it is!" sneered Lack. "Crow again, my cock!"

Then to Margaret:

"This ugly little 'un, I expect, belongs to the king. If I was Charles, I'd throw him to the lions in the Lions' Tower."

"Thus far," responded Margaret, "he has proved my friend; and I entreat you to let me go with him, and for the kindness you shall always find a round of beef and a mug of ale at the Barley Mow."

"That's very sensible talk," rejoined Lack, thoughtfully; "and if it weren't for others, you'd soon be on the way to your father's inn. A round of beef, when 'un is hungry, is a werry good thing. A mammoth pasty the same. A mug of ale, ditto. But if you're sharp—and you've got a sharp eye—you know enough to give inconvenience to one as can't be named here. There's 'eads among us that might be cotched in baskets. Again, there's 'eads among us that might be cotched in ropes!"

Lack Billson drew his right forefinger slowly across his neck with a meaning grimace.

"I have understood nothing of your secrets," protested Margaret.

Lack blew up his face with unspeakable incredulity.

"The cat is well out of the bag, and you saw which way it jumped," responded the vagrant, with a knowing leer.

Just then a man entered abruptly. His face was harsh and strongly marked, his figure awkward and somewhat meagre. He closed the door hastily, and demanded hurriedly.

"Have you seen Monmouth? That plotting Jeffreys, I fear, has ruined us!"

Margaret crouched behind the large chair. She felt a secret terror of this sudden visitor. The vagrant stood embarrassed and silent. He seemed placed in a position from which he knew no means of immediate extrication. He made grotesque pantomime to the new-comer, who was too much engrossed to heed it.

"Speak, you villain!" added the man. "My life hangs on a thread. A paper has been stolen. Monmouth has risked all to recover it. If he has failed, there will be work for Leecherat!"

"More 'eads in baskets! Lord have mercy on us!" exclaimed Billson.

"Out upon thee, knave! Such heads as thine will never become acquainted with the axe. Who will take the trouble to look for Lack Billson, the vagrant, when nobler game is afoot? Thou art but the servile instrument of a purpose far above thy comprehension. A noble hand plays for a stake paramount to gold. Strolling vagabond! What is a robbery, now and then, of some great lord or lady, but a passing jest, a momentary wonder, to set the inquisitive agape? There is something more than the hue and cry of the White and the Black; though, i' faith, the lark has been right bravely played. All London is open-mouthed with vulgar wonder!"

He paused, and rubbed the palms of his hands together abstractedly.

"Go on, Master Ferguson, go on! Diwulge all you know! Let out your violence. Your secrets, moreover. Don't look at me when I make various diewices to attract your attention. Go right on a conversin' afore strangers! Don't mind that arms and head in the corner!"

Billson pointed at Grub.

"Don't mind that young ooman abind the chair! Not at all. Not in the least. Likewise. Notwithstan'in'. Also!"

Lack Billson puffed his cheeks, sunk his nose, and looked irreparably injured.

"Damn this darkness!" muttered Ferguson, looking vaguely about the dim cell. "Ho, ho! There's that arch-devil, Grub! Why didn't you speak, Billson, before the murder was out? But I'll soon make an end of him. We can cast his misshapen carcass into the moat or the Thames."

Ferguson drew his sword, and took a step toward the dwarf, with the evident purpose of running him through, but was brought to a sudden pause by the sight of a large holster-pistol, held in one of the long hands of Grub.

"Come on! come on!" he howled. "We'll see which can travel the fastest, steel or lead. Ho, ho! My name is Grub, Grub, Grub! Call me devil, Bob; call me devil! I can have you drawn on a hurdle, Bob Ferguson, and your head cut off, and your body quartered and hung up, one piece over the Traitor's Gate, another on London Bridge, another at Tower Hill, and another at Tyburn! I'm Satan, Satan, Satan!"

The dwarf laughed frightfully. Ferguson drew back, and dropped the point of his sword to the floor.

"I know you! I know you!" shouted Grub. "You are full of plotting and intrigue. You live at three different places in London. You dodge an' you skulk. I've seen you go in and out. When you want monay, you get it. How do you get it? Ha, ha! Ask Grub, Grub, Grub! Grub knows everything. Grub goes everywhere. You are leading the son of Lucy Walters to ruin. The axe is made that will cut off his head. He'll die violently, and you'll die violently. Good, good, good! I like it, I like it, I like it! I don't belong to your race. I've no love for monsters six feet high. I'll have 'em shorter, shorter, shorter. A man with his head off is not a head taller than Grub. Ho, ho!"

The dwarf's shrill laugh made Margaret tremble, as she cowered behind the chair.

"This thing is from hell!" muttered Ferguson.

"True, true, true! They're inquiring down there for Robert Ferguson. If your time wasn't short, I'd send you now. I'm tempted to shoot you through the centre of the brain. Nobody can shoot like Grub. Call me devil; call me devil!"

"He's a wulture and a vampire!" murmured Billson. "He makes me shiver and quiver like a lump of jelly. Let me go, Master Ferguson, and I'll be content with a wated kennel and the permiscuous wittles."

"Peace! peace!" said Ferguson, sheathing his sword. "Put up your pistol, Satan, and I will buy your silence with gold."

"Buy my silence with gold!" mimicked Grub. "I have heaps of gold, already. I have hoarded it away; not that I care for it, but that I may laugh at the fools who barter their souls for it. I could load a pack-mule with gold in a little while. Begone, beggar! You are poor, poor, poor! I am rich, rich, rich!"

He stopped and added, in a different voice:

"Margaret Gurther, arise. I will protect you, though a score of Fergusons withstood me."

Margaret staggered to her feet.

"Another!" cried Ferguson. "What trickery is this? Lack, knave, you shall answer for this!"

"She'll answer for herself, peradventure, I never knowed a ooman as couldnt answer for herself. You needn't work yourself into a vexation, sir, for I knows no more of this than a blessed infant. Here I found her, and here she is. If you can make 'ead or tail out, your welcome."

Ferguson deliberately fell back against the door, and folded his arms upon his breast.

"I am greatly at a loss," he said, with a calmness he had not before exhibited.

"Young woman, give an account of yourself."

"Come here, Meg, come here! Don't speak to him; answer him not a word," said the dwarf, authoritatively.

Tremblingly Margaret advanced, and stood beside Grub, whose deformity increased her beauty indescribably by contrast. Ferguson began to admire her.

"You have heard," he said, with deliberation, "what the crown jewels would not have

tempted me to divulge. Self-preservation, young woman, is the over-ruling law of nature. All that a man hath will he give for his life. I would not do injustice to one of your sex, but you cannot go hence. I will answer for your personal safety, but for the present, your detention and confinement are imperative. I regret the necessity, but it is absolute and beyond recall."

"You forget the devil! You forget Grub, Grub, Grub! I can whisk her away through the air. I can sink her down through the earth. I can spirit her through the wall. Call me Satan; call me Satan!"

Grub pushed against the wall with his hand. A door flew open with a spring and a click. He threw one of his long arms around Margaret's waist, and dragged her out of sight before Billson or Ferguson could interpose. The secret door closed with marvelous quickness, and the mocking laugh of Grub was heard on the other side.

CHAPTER XX.

CROWFOOT AND HUTCH.

"For one as hasn't slept for forty year—" said Mistress Bab Crowfoot, as she bent over her black saucepan that was heating dubiously o'er a slow fire of sticks—"For one as hasn't slept for forty years, a little summat warmin' is merakerlous good! I feels it in my systum, and it stands in the place of sleep and repose. Of sleep and repose in the still watches, when my mind roves and perpoderates on the law, and them as makes the law, and by the law ought to perish."

Two persons, exclusive of the sleepless woman, sat beside the slow fire, watching the gradual heating of the saucepan. One was Ingulphus Hutch, with his wilited bagpipe across his knees; the other, Moll Pool, in the guise of the unkempt youth, in which Kyte Linkhorn had made her acquaintance a few evenings before.

"I'd rather hear you talk, Miss Crowfoot, than to hear a person read a story book," said Moll. "I says to myself: 'How much one must know who thinks right on for forty year?' If this isn't so, then my name 'isn't Dick Slicer."

Bab see-sawed in her chair, as if fully sensible of her own merits. Mr. Hutch dragged himself gently from the lethargy in which he had been indulging, and seizing Moll's hand, rubbed it to and fro over another ridge-pole on his skull, and said, in his inimitable whisper:

"Cutlass!"

"It's a famous thing," said Moll, "to be hacked up in that way. I've often wished that I'd been to the wars, and come back full of lead and cuts. I'd like to set down and talk of my scars of an evening."

Ingulphus rolled up his left sleeve, and bissed:

"Slug!"

No one could have heard him without regretting that he also was not full of slugs.

"Pike, spear, javelin, lance, dart, arrow, spontoon, dagger, dirk, axe, bill, pole-axe, battle-axe, halberd, mace, truncheon, bludgeon, catapult, battering-ram!" said Mr. Hutch, swelling with emotion.

Mrs. Crowfoot favored him with a deprecatory glance. What was all this to a woman who hadn't slept for forty year? Nothing; and the sleepless creature felt it so.

"Any one," quoth Bab, shaking her head sadly at the simmering saucepan, "may be be-sliced, and be-cut, and bamboozled with different kinds o' weepoms, but it's few indeed that has the expeerence of unclosed leds through the rewolving nights of the number o' years aforementioned; nor would I upon any mortal wish the same."

"Crossbow, arquebuss, ballister, sling, petronelle, pistol!" added Hutch, impressively, touching various parts of his person.

"You ought to write a book, both of you," said the false Dick Slicer.

"If my life was writ, such a book it would be as was never read. If my thoughts was writ, sich a book it would be as was never read. If my turnin's and twistin's through the still watches was writ, it would be sich a book as was never read. If my investigations of the law and them as made it was writ, it would be such a book as was never read!"

Bab see-sawed solemnly, then turning to Moll, let herself gently down from her intellectual height by saying:

"Dick, put on a stick."

"Nobody ever tires of battles and wounds, fire and smoke, sieges, sorties, storms, pitched-battles, and forlorn hopes," said Ingulphus, mechanically inflating his pipes.

"True, true," echoed Moll. "Both of you are right. The water boils in the pan. I'll mix such a hot drink as you shall allow you never tasted. I brought a bottle of spirit that is oily with age. It would tempt the lips of a saint. I wonder how Kyte Linkhorn feels, down in the dark? What a gull, to be sure!"

"Ho, ho!" exclaimed Bab. "He'd be a wagrant, would he? He'd begin his wagrancy with five hundred guineas, eh? I caree little for the White and the Black masks, and sich, but I does mind about the law, which I hate and despise, abhor and condemn, scorn and defy! He wanted to give it a wicshot? He's a victim hisself! That's the upshot? We're born nat'r'l, nat'r'l let us live. What we wan't to do, that let us do. If it's to rob, rob; if it's to tramp, tramp. That's liberty, and no other there is. Fair play, hand's off. If a chap wants to make watches, let him make 'em; but if, t'otherwise, he wants to grow rich by the crackin' of a neck, let him go down into the damp, and the moist, and the mould, and rot there!"

"Rot there!" murmured Ingulphus Hutch, with a little drone of his pipe.

"Rot there!" repeated Dick Slicer, the spurious, who had set himself to work mixing that "summat warmin'" alluded to by Mrs. Crowfoot.

"Dick," said Mr. Hutch, fixing his warlike eyes on the disguised Glasspool, "you a'n't jest of the make to be a soger. The more I looks at ye, the more I think so. I'll be shot if you a'n't too soft and female in your systum to stan' up and bear the rubs and brushes of a campaign."

Mrs. Crowfoot deigned to turn her sleepless orbs on the counterfeit youth. She inspected him from his tangled locks to his indifferently shod feet. Something was working in her brain, though not very powerfully. Moll made herself as busy as possible with the hot water and other ingredients. The conversation had taken an unwelcome direction.

"Your hands," observed Bab, "might be like a girl's, if clean. It's strange that a Dick Slicer should have jist such hands. You haven't hurt yourself with work, Dick. You needn't say you've hurt yourself with work. What with my wakefulness, and what with my perponderatin's on the law, and what with my reflections generally, and what with my turnin's and twistin's, seekin' sleep and repose, there isn't many as can come up to me in the way of a judgment and a opinion. Your mother must a been a unfortinit creetur who had seen better days."

"Ingulphus," said Moll, in a tone of conviction, "do you see how she gets at things? She searches a chap as if she was a eye-stone agoin' through the mind arter a mote. True, every word on't!"

Moll presented Bab with a tin cup of the steaming mixture she had by this time made. She received it grimly, and finding it too hot, submitted to have it cooled with more of the contents of the bottle. Hutch willingly accepted the same favor, and hob-a-nobbed with the old woman. The effects were characteristic. The man that was so stabbed and jabbed grew fierce, talked savagely, and wanted to quarrel with somebody; while Crowfoot see-sawed more violently, and grew harder and harder on the law and those who tamely yielded to its restraints.

Glasspool shaped her conversation to the humors of both, and gradually drew them to the subject of her thoughts—Kyte Linkhorn.

"It's a pity," she said, "that something couldn't be made of him."

"Who?" queried Crowfoot, curtly.

"The informer as is down below," answered Moll.

Hutch suggested that he might be made into "sassingers." He believed he had eaten "Roundhead sassingers." He mildly squeaked his chanter on the back of this belief.

"Go away with your heathen notions!" retorted Crowfoot, severely. "I'd have you to feel that the Crow's Nest is a respectable place. Go away, you hacked-up choppin'-block!"

"This journeyman," added Moll, interposing to prevent a serious disagreement, "knows the ins and outs of the Three Dials."

"Well?" snarled the sleepless woman. "Supposin' he does?"

"Who can fit a key like the watchmaker's man? Who can lay his hand on the swag like the watchmaker's man?"

Glasspool spoke like one plunged in interesting and useful meditation.

"If the watchmaker's man," cried Mrs. Crowfoot, "knew the ins and the outs of the Three Dials a hundred times better nor he does; if the watchmaker's man knew how to fit a key a hundred times better; if the watchmaker's man could lay his hands on the swag a hundred times better, it wouldn't be of no manner of use to him, nor me, nor you, nor nobody! Let him mould on his straw! Let him grow damp on his straw! Let him grow cold, cold on his straw!"

A baleful light glowed in the eyes of the sleepless woman. Her own spirit and the run-and-water spirit flamed up together. She pendulated her lank body from side to side, in the fervor of her malice.

"Swag is swag," muttered Hutch, "no matter who gits it or vere it comes from. There's heaps of tickers at the Three Dials that might be invested in the Crow's Nest."

"Go and git 'em, then!" said Bab.

"I should want a pal as was used to the place," replied the man of lead.

Moll sipped daintily at her cup, and plied her two friends liberally, watching the effects of her ministrations with no little anxiety; for she contemplated nothing less than the liberation of Kyte Linkhorn.

The sleepless woman grew sleepy. Ingulphus Hutch yawned, and both drone and chantar lost breath. The prospect of success was good. The old woman went off, now and then, in cat-naps, coming out with a jerk of the head and a wiry spasm of the neck, muttering of a vigil of forty years, and the enormity of the law.

Hutch made an abortive attempt to show about a dozen of his scars, but grew muggy at the third stab, swore he'd have somebody's life, and dropped into a doze.

Moll thought the moment for action had come. The Crow's Nest was marvelously still. The nocturnal chattering, cawing, and brawling, had not begun; but there was danger of the return of the unclean brood. They would soon, doubtless, be fluttering in with the proceeds of a day's thieving and vagrancy; some heavy and some light. The revels would then commence. Glasspool felt the need of haste. She was in the act of lighting a torch by the fire, when the shaking and creaking of the stairs delayed her purpose and warned her of the coming of another party. It was Lack Billson, who, at that inopportune juncture, revealed his round face, short body, and cropped head, at the Crow's Nest.

Moll heartily wished him at the bottom of Tunbridge Wells. She slid quietly upon a settle, and fell to nodding with Ingulphus and the sleepless woman.

"Here's a werry select circle!" said Billson, eyeing the sleepers, the saucepan, and the tin cups. "Dick Slicer, you uncombed wagrant, where's your manners? Gi' me some!"

Moll started, and thrust a joint of each forefinger into an eye, to push out what sleep might be in them.

"Gi' me some!" repeated Lack.

"Hello!" said Glasspool. "Who speaks? What do I hear?"

"Peradventure, you hear the voice of a wagrant!" quoth Mr. Billson. "Gi' me some!"

"With the greatest pleasure, as the hangman said to the man, when he put the rope round his neck. Set down, my jolly. Be patient, my trumper. Will ye have it hot and strong?"

"At your conwenience. Odds fish! The forty-year creetur is takin' her rewenge. Sleeps as contented as a oyster. She's a rum 'un! Here's old Cromwell's choppin'-block, likewise, with a leaden weight on his leds. Take away his cuts, and thrus, and slugs, and he wouldn't live, that creetur wouldn't. Wake up, my pincushion for swords, and pikes, and lances! Inwigrorate yourself, old Mincemeat!"

Billson gave Hutch a push with his foot; he straightened a little, and murmured: "Slugs!"

"Daman that piper and his slugs! I wish some of the doctors would git hold of him, and spile their tools on the spear-heads, and bits of steel, that is planted in his corpus,

Somebody'd do me a conweinence if they'd pick a peck o' lead out o' that chap and let him go at half ballast. Throw that wagrant into the water and he'd sink quicker'n a stone. Dick, if you ever gits a hopportunity, push this here virtuous bagpiper into the Thames. We can't afford to keep so many scars at the Crow's Nest; it's a luxury, Dick, as we musn't wentur' on." Mr. Billson sighed a sigh of relief, reached out a chubby hand, and added: "Gi' me some!"

Dick gave him "some." The "some," whatever it was, was very hot, and very strong, and a rummy fog curled from the top of it.

"Dick," said the vagrant, when he had scalded his mouth, "what is it as salootes my nose?"

"I don't know," said Moll.

"Smells like laudleum! Like opium, moreover. Like poppy, notwithstanding."

Mary Glasspool dived her face suddenly into her tin cup. She felt uncomfortable, rather. She knew that Lack was not the mild soul he generally seemed.

"It must be uncommon good, then," she remarked. "I've heard old 'uns say that liquors as has the flavor of poppy is the regular stuff."

"The fust time I've heerd it mentioned," replied the vagrant, with an incredulous glance at Dick. "However, it's powerful appetizin'. It is wittles. It is drink. Beverage, also. Norrishin', moreover."

He held up the cup and looked at it.

"I'm its wampyre," he said, distending his cheeks between the pauses. "He fastened his lips to the cup, and sucked its warm blood.

"Yours till death, as the man said to the hexecutioner. There's that laudleum taste ag'in! Dick, I'm a uncommon wild warmint, a'n't I?"

"You be. I don't know where to look for your mate. You're full o' compassion," answered the perfidious Slicer.

"True as the book of Revelations! But don't wentur' on it. Don't take adwantage o' goodness. Don't let wiciousness git inside of ye. And last of all, don't diwulge. Diwulge nothin'! Afore I go further, gi' me some!"

Dick refilled his cup.

"The Crow's nest, sonny, is a Brotherhood. Wot one does, we all does. We're bound by a oath. He as betrays us won't fare so well as the watchmaker's man. He as betrays us, will have the movement taken out of him, or out of her. Rewenge, Dick, re-wenge! Violence!"

Lack threw the full force of his cranberry eyes upon the smooth face of Moll, who had as much as she could do to keep her firmness.

"If we should catch 'um playin' us a trick, adoin' us a hinjury, that 'un as was cotched would never go to Tyburn 'less we sent him; but he'd go—" Lack raised his finger, and gradually turned his hand till it pointed downward—"but he'd go—he'd go where none of his friends would weep over his grave! The same with any of us. The same with him. The same with her. The same with you and me. The same with any man, ooman, or child."

The vagrant's manner was to Mary Glasspool both impressive and disagreeable. She wondered what whispering imp possessed his imagination precisely at that time? She hoped his erratic mind would soon go off on another track. She knew that desperate men were associated with him and this vagrant clan. The consequences of falsehood to the few and simple regulations of the beggarly crew, were visited with vengeance secret and terrible. With all her natural audacity of character, she half regretted her introduction to the Crow's Nest.

CHAPTER XXI.

MATTERS AT THE CROW'S NEST.

Lack Billson began to yield to the power of his potations. He experienced a heaviness quite unusual, but talked on in a discursive manner. He retained sufficient sense to be suspicious, manifesting a curiosity concerning Dick Slicer that he had not before displayed. He drew up to the crippled table, and rambled on with thick utterance:

"My father was a wagrant, my mother was a wagrant, and I'm a wagrant. Gi' me liberty and the road! Gi' me my legs to walk on, and my arms to take things with! Gi' me the gutter, or a gap under a hedge, or a lane, or a alley, a hovel, or a stall. It's all one

It's the same. Wot's wittles? Isn't all Lunnon a cookin' for me? Wot's clothes? Isn't all the weavers o' Spittalfields a weavin' for me?"

Lack shut his eyes and seemed vastly content. He opened them suddenly, and looked severely at the bogus Slicer.

"Wot be you hauntin' the Crow's Nest for, little 'un? Who knows you? What do you wan't? Come, sir, we must understand this! Be ye goin' to jine the Free and United Wagrants?.. Be ye goin' to leave the wanities outside, and snap your fingers at work and trade, and all the follies o' life?"

"That's what I'm reachin' after," Moll said.

"I wouldn't take my oath of that. You may be a little villain. You look to me like a little villain."

His cheeks went out, and his nose went in. He struck the table with his clenched hand.

"You're hard on a cove!" remonstrated Dick. "You're hard on a cove as wants to rise. How can a cove rise when you're hard on him?"

"Look here, you wiciousness! Did you ever hear of spies among the Free and United Wagrants?"

Lack stared steadily at Dick Slicer.

"Served 'em right!" stammered the latter. "No business to done it."

"You're a downy 'un!" retorted Billson, who was now obliged to yawn very often, and whose ill-humor increased with his intoxication. "Gi' me some!" He pushed his cup toward Moll, who replenished it. He drained it, and presently his chin began to settle upon his chest. He had several spells of resuscitation before finally succumbing. He started up frequently with various denunciatory remarks: "Confound you, boy! what you doin'? You're a vanity and a vexation! Don't look at that trap-door. This advice hear: "Mind your own business. Don't meddle with things below. You're drunk, you warmint! I'll take wengeance on you tomorrow. Where's Hutch? Where's Bab? Wot ails 'em all? Where's the vultures and the wampyres?"

Billson's head sank upon the table, and he was instantly heard breathing heavily.

Ingulphus, who had muttered, occasionally, the words "broadsword, cutlass," etc., slid from his chair upon his collapsed pipes, in consequence of a severe struggle with a hard knot in his nose, that wouldn't come untied by all his efforts. Mrs. Crowfoot was in such a limp and lax state, that she settled into a shape representing the crescent moon, her back being the upper segment. In fact, a lean doll-baby of enormous size, dumped into a chair, with the head pitched dangerously forward, and the arms hanging inert and straight as plumb-lines, is a figure that may convey quite a satisfactory conception of the sleeping pose of the sleepless woman.

The scheming Dick Slicer now seemed master of the situation. But there was not a moment to spare. It was full time for the vagrant crows to come flapping to the Nest. Moll looked at one, then at another of her cup-companions, and stood last by the suspicious Billson. She did not care to believe the wily cormorant on evidence slight and perhaps deceptive. She rattled his cup on the table, and said:

"Take some! Take some! A'n't goin' to drop off in this way, be ye? Flicker, my cove. Sparkle. Blaze. Flame out!"

Lack would neither flicker nor blaze, sparkle nor flame out, but rattled the string of knots that were lodged somewhere in the interior of his nasal arrangements. Not yet satisfied, and by way of experiment, Glasspool turned something like a gill of rum on the top of his cropped head, little brooks of which found their way to his eyes, with no other effect than to produce a slight twitching of the red selvage. But that which was most convincing, was the fact that two well-defined rivulets ran across his mouth without being sucked up. Moll accepted this as conclusive evidence of the genuineness of his slumber, and without further delay, lighted a torch and commenced the practical part of her business at the Crow's Nest. She readily found the trap, but experienced difficulty in opening it; and it was not till after many trials and a severe tax upon her strength, that she succeeded in raising it. It creaked vexatiously, and what was more, rang a bell directly over the wide fireplace, where Bab was flexed upon her own

corpus, rioting in sleep after a vigil of forty years.

Glasspool ran, mounted a settle, and smothered the bell with her hand. This alarm was a device entirely unsuspected by Moll. Fortunately it did not, in this instance, answer its purpose. With quick steps she hurried below. She stood on the bare earth, at a loss in what direction to carry her investigations. The change of air was notable; above, it was warm, with a chronic impregnation of tobacco, and spirit, and filth; beneath, it was like the soul emanations of a plague-ditch. Heaps of unnamable rubbish lay here and there; broken bottles, tatters of clothing, decaying straw, the meagre refuse of beggary and theft.

The erratic yet brave Mary Glasspool shivered involuntarily, as her eyes followed the streaming beams of her torch to the various quarters of the den. The impulse to make a hasty retreat was strong upon her at first, but pity for Linkhorn soon gave her sufficient nerve to proceed. Stoutly overcoming her repugnance, and a certain mysterious dread that the place inspired, she moved quickly toward the spot where she believed she should find the watchmaker's man. Never in her life had she traversed a crypt so dark and repulsive. She would not have been greatly surprised had the ghosts of murdered victims risen before her. Unfortunate creatures, doubtless, had met foul play there. She noticed several heaps of earth, and her fears readily suggested that something more than common soil could be found beneath.

The Crow's Nest was too old not to have its startling histories. She wiped the damps from her face and breathed fast. Presently she began to call Linkhorn; at first timidly, then in a firmer tone. It was sometime before she received a response, and it came so faintly that she questioned its reality. At length the sounds were sufficiently defined to determine their origin, and to guide her to the kennel into which he had been cast, and which was sealed up, as it were, with a thick wooden door, secured without by a large bar, which was so heavy and fitted so closely, that to slip it through the brackets put all her strength in requisition.

Thrusting the socket of her torch into the ground, she set about the business with so much earnestness, that the door was soon open.

Kyte Linkhorn presented a melancholy spectacle. He was lying upon some straw, greatly downcast and wilted by confinement. Fear and anxiety, in conjunction with the execrable air and bread and water, had wrought a very appreciable change in his appearance. His cheeks were pale, his eyes sunken, and his manner hopeless in the extreme.

"Very damp here!" muttered the journeyman. "Very damp, indeed!"

Moll perceived that his mind was somewhat unsettled.

"Truly it is damp. Arise, my friend, and come away."

"Do you see anything unusual about me?" asked the journeyman, looking anxiously at his visitor. Not quite comprehending him, she shook her head.

"You ought to see a change," said Linkhorn, dubiously. "I'm a frog, and I lie at the bottom of a well. See how slimy I am! You'll hear me croak pretty soon, if you wait. As near as I can reckon, I've been at the bottom of this here well about a hundred year. I've been tryin' to hop out; but life of my body, there isn't a frog in the world that can hop out!"

"Come, come! Banish these fancies. You'll soon be at liberty. This way, journeyman. Keep at my heels and you shall presently be beneath the clear arch of heaven."

Kyte Linkhorn, laboring under a strong frog view of the case, got upon all fours, and cut a few frog capers, manifesting a willingness to follow Moll in that particular fashion of locomotion.

"Get up, you Longlegs, and walk like a decent Christian. This is no time for foolery!" answered Glasspool, sharply.

"If you want me to stand on my hind legs, you'll be disappointed. I, nor no other frog, can do it. What a sight it would be to see a frog a walkin' on his hind legs! Don't expect no sich developments. Every cretur has his own particlar movement, 'ordin' to the laws o' natur. Ha! ha! ha! Go along, go along, you phantom!"

Moll began to entertain serious apprehensions that Kyte Linkhorn had gone mad; and when she considered the circumstances, and the wretched den in which he was im-mured, she did not wonder that his mind should yield to strange and unnatural fancies. She examined him more closely. His eyes were vacant and his face meaningless. That he must be brought out of this state at once, to insure the success of her plan, was evident. He was crouching at her feet like a mammoth toad. Clearly, he had resolved to maintain his character as an incarcerated frog; a character certainly very difficult for Moll to manage, as she could not, conveniently, in that shape, hop him out of the Crow's Nest.

"Boys," quoth the journeyman, sepulchrally, "drive frogs with sticks."

"That isn't my way," said Moll. "I drive 'em with fire!" Glasspool assumed a fierce expression, and plunged her torch full at the frog's haunches. The experiment proved eminently successful. With a roar of pain, the distraught Linkhorn sprang to his feet, and stared at Moll in unspeakable surprise.

The Roaring Girl had achieved a triumph. The sudden shock diverted the morbid current of his consciousness, and restored him to something approximating to sense.

"Call in your wits," said Moll. "Remember where you are, and how you came here. If you will follow me without delay, we may be able to escape from this den of thieves."

"Has he come for the watch?" asked the journeyman, vaguely.

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed the girl, who was getting uncomfortably nervous.

"Five hundred guineas!" murmured Linkhorn. "It's a nice beginning. See that Red Lion street is well guarded."

It was vexatiously apparent that his mind had seized upon a fragment of memory, and was wandering unguided in the past. The young woman placed her hand on his shoulder and shook him gently.

"Brighten, man, brighten! Think of the vagrant and the Crow's Nest."

"The Crow's Nest as it down in St. Giles?" said Linkhorn, vacantly.

"Yes," said Moll, eagerly, hoping to lead him gradually to the present.

"St. Giles, as is full o' kennels and boards to sleep on, and the bare ground to sleep on, and straw wringing-wet to sleep on."

"And vagrants," suggested Moll.

"I'm a vagrant myself," quoth Linkhorn. "I flops anywhere, with nothing under and with nothing atop. Does it snow? Crawl in. Does it rain? Let the rain be damned!" He made a feeble gesture, and looked determinedly at the girl. His thoughts were at the Barley Mow, drinking sack with Lack Billson. "Where's them wittles," he continued, "as all Lunnon is a cookin'? Where's the fryin'-pans, and the stew-kettles, and the ovens, and the other vessels as cooks wittles? Bring 'em, you young scamp! Lay on 'em hands of violence."

The watchmaker frowned at Moll, and evinced a disposition to commence an assault on account of the said eatables.

"Come on," said Moll, "and we'll soon be at the victuals. Come! they are smoking hot on the table."

"Then let some of 'em as is workin' for us bring 'em!" cried Linkhorn. "A'n't the drudgers a drudgin', the workers a workin', the traders a tradin', the drovers a drovin', and all the world a runnin' itself to death for us? Don't talk to me, you smooth-faced 'un! Don't come here with your argyments as a'n't of no valley. Where's Billson? Where's the forty-year hag? Wot's broke loose, eh?"

Moll drew him forward by the arm. Her pulses were flying fast with apprehension. She expected momentarily to hear the tread of feet over her head. Should she leave the poor fellow to his fate? She had not the heart to abandon him.

"Bab Crowfoot is after us, and we must get away from her," she said.

"Bring her on! I should like to fight her. I'd soon spot her dial for her, the old wixen!" Kyte doubled his fists and made ready to "square off" to give punishment.

Moll bethought her of a last expedient. She advanced her face to his ear, and pronounced the name of Jenty Mandrake. It struck on his pilgrim senses like the knell of a bell on a sensitive ear. He started and

rubbed his forehead with an uncertain movement.

"Who said that?" he murmured.

"Jenty waits for you. Let us go to her," added Moll, with earnestness.

"I'll go. But stop a minute. What's the matter? Has anything happened?"

"Heaven be praised! He shows a little reason at last."

She held the link nearer his pale face, hoping to catch some gleam of returning reason. His sunken eyes were, indeed, struggling with the darkness of incoherence, and gradually lighting up with coming memories.

"The movement," he said, with an effort to be lucid, "is out o' order. Touch the regulator; set it forrad a trifle. Who are you, lad?"

Mary Glasspool repeated her name.

"Ah—yes—I begin to understand; that is, unless I am dreaming. It seems to me that I've been where it was damp and dark. It appears like as if I had been shut up in a grave big enough to stand up in, and turn round in, and lay down in, and starve in, and suffer horribly in!"

"You are right; and I am here to take you from that grave. If you would be saved, hold fast to that shimmering gleam of reason, and do as I bid you. The cormorants and crows will soon come swooping to their nest. This moment is ours; the next may be theirs."

"God knows I am willing to go anywhere where it is light and dry! I have been too long where it is dark and wet."

Mary Glasspool led the watchmaker as if he were a child. She stood with him at the foot of the steps. She urged him to ascend; but his mind wavered again, and he staggered from weakness. The friendly girl, seeing his physical inability, ran up the stairs and returned with the bottle she had left on the table. It still contained about two gills of spirit.

"Drink!" said Moll. "Drink! It will, perchance, put life and energy into you."

Kyte caught at the bottle like a drowning man, and drained it to the last drop before it left his lips. He let it fall upon the ground, when it was emptied with a sigh of inexpressible gratification. She watched him anxiously. The effect, though nearly instantaneous, was yet laggard to her wish. He felt a stream of vitality in his stomach, and presently there were veins of red in his cheeks, as if the stagnant blood had suddenly found circulation.

"Up! up!" admonished Moll. "If you escape not now, Heaven only knows when another opportunity will offer!"

"It is dreadfully dark and damp! Yes, let us up. Let us up and away." Linkhorn's foot was on the first stair. Moll's heart beat with expectation. Three minutes, if nothing happened, would give them safety.

The watchmaker's weight pressed the second step, when a noise was heard above, on the floor level with the street.

"Down! down!" cried the girl, grasping Linkhorn by the collar, and dragging him back. "The opportunity is lost. All is lost. We are lost!"

CHAPTER XXII.

DANGER.

"What is to be done?" asked Linkhorn, on whose chilled frame, deadened circulation, and cramped limbs the liquor had acted most potently.

"I know not," answered Moll, pressing a hand to her beating heart. "There is but One who knows, and He is that One who keeps his own counsels. He never tells, Kyte Linkhorn!" Her chin sank upon her bosom; and for the first time during that eventful night, her eyes grew moist.

"Life of my body!" groaned the journeyman. "It is my slow and wanderin' wits as has gone for to do this." He clasped his hands and looked despairingly at the earth. "But it is so damp and so dark!" he muttered. "So cold and damp!" he added, deprecatingly. "So slimy and damp! It crept into my bones, did the poison-damp. It stood on my face in drops. It breathed through me like death!" The watchmaker shuddered. "I dared not touch myself with my own hand," he went on. "If it came in contact with my flesh, it was so clammy that I fancied the est or the adder crept over me."

"I would that we could close the trap," said Moll; "but we cannot. Some of the

brood have already reached the Net. This torch will betray us at once, if we remain here. Let us hide ourselves in some remote corner. If we can do no more, we will at least defer the catastrophe as long as possible."

She moved from the immediate vicinity of the trap, and the watchmaker mechanically followed her. Having reached the most obscure part of the crypt, Moll paused to reflect and decide upon some course of action.

"This is kind of you, Mistress Mary," said Linkhorn, in a subdued voice. "I confess as I wasn't prepared for so much friendliness from you."

"I dare say not. Not much good have you heard of me, I'll warrant. I know what is said; I know how my name is bandied from tongue to tongue. I know that my name is passed to and fro like a shuttlecock." She stopped an instant, then added: "Well, I have deserved it. It is what I knew would follow my wild freaks. I don't profess to be better than I am. What matters talk? I am not one to be killed off by gossip. I act my nature, and the best can do no more. While I live, I suppose I must be dashing Moll Pool; bold Moll Pool; lawless Moll Pool, and the Roaring Girl. But let those," she went on, compressing her lips and frowning, "who have had favors of Mary Glasspool, boast of the same!"

Her eyes sparkled with irrepressible exultation.

"There!" she said, presently. "You have heard what others have never heard from the lips of Moll Pool. Let it drop. In this world it is impossible to discriminate the good from the bad. There is but One in the vast stretch of time and space who can say: 'This is a good man. That is a bad woman.' What a time there will be when the judges are judged!"

Moll ceased speaking, and bent her head to listen to the sounds above.

"The foul birds are coming in," she said. "How are we to avert distinction? These are birds of prey. Treachery is the signal object of their wrath and vengeance. I need not tell you, my friend, that our lives are in great danger. Bab Crowfoot and Lack Billson will, by-and-by, come out of their dull sleep. They are drugged. I drugged them to liberate you. But before they awake, the open trap-door will very likely attract suspicion."

The journeyman sat down on a box and trembled. The realization of his situation was too much for his weak nerves to bear calmly. She feared he would relapse to his former insanity. It was impossible to be more awkwardly placed. She sensed fully the difficulties that surrounded her. Mary Glasspool had more than the ordinary fortitude of her sex, but she was far from willing to resign her hold upon sublunary things. For her, as for all young persons, existence had its charms. She was happy in her own way and fashion. If her way and fashion were unlike the way and fashion of others, the peculiarity was ingrained, and arose from the temper of her making up. She shrank with terror from the thought of dying in a kennel of vagrants, and wayside assassins.

Her mission to the Crow's Nest had been one of mercy, stimulated, it is true, by a love of adventure.

"Watchmaker's man," she said, anon, "you must go back to your burrow, and be shut up."

Linkhorn stared at her mournfully, and muttered something about the cold and the damp.

"A hole in this earth will be colder and damper," she answered, pointing downward with her finger.

"Do you think as they above would have the heart? The heart as to go and do it?" His voice quavered.

"If they faltered, the hag Crowfoot would hound them on."

"But there is my friend Billson. He won't allow it. A man as is so lively and so jolly won't see us murdered."

"He has but one voice. He cannot withstand fifty, even if his good-nature should triumph over the callousness of his perverted nature. There is good in him, and there is evil, too. Put not your trust in him. Rely on yourself and me. Bab is thoroughly wicked. Ingulphus Hutch, Kitty Gracchus, and a dozen others, are her willing instruments. Herk!"

A wild burst of laughter rolled down into

the cellar. The vagrants were amusing themselves with the somniferous condition of the three sleepers.

"They'll wake 'em up!" groaned Linkhorn. "It'll soon be all over with us. I wish the devil had those same five hundred guineas. Ah! Jenty, Jenty!"

"That is well, my friend; think of Jenty. The thought of your sweetheart will, perchance, give you courage."

"I might been sittin' at my shelf at the Three Dials, adjustin' the movements, a ruminatin' on my love, and a sayin' to myself: 'We'll be married this day six months, or this day year, or this day a dozen year, as the case might be. A bein' don't know when he is 'appy, till summat has 'appened to him. I wish the masked robber had swallowed his watch instead o' bringin' it to me. The expectation of money takes away a poor man's sense."

"Listen! The crows are rummaging the Nest. Bab Crowfoot will not have a bottle of sack nor a draught of ale by morning. There will be a drunken revel. The saints shield us from their fury when they become maddened by intoxication! My friend, you will be safest in your den."

"Good Moll! Sweet Mary Glasspool! Don't speak of it. Don't ask me to crawl into the reekin' cold and the deadly damp. If you do, my mind will stagger again and the wheels 'll stop."

Kyte arose and stood beseechingly before her, his tall, lank figure bowed, his pale lips quivering.

"Nay! Be a man. Your safety requires this sacrifice of your feelings."

"Again fastened in that miserable place of darkness, nothing will be left me but to die there."

"Hear me! I will leave one end of the bar out of the socket, that you may push open the door, in case no one comes to your relief."

Linkhorn sighed and shook his head. He wondered that Mary Glasspool could stand there so calmly, with a vision of death before her eyes. There was a difference in human nature; some could do what others could not. He secretly confessed that he had not the cool, philosophical courage of the girl before him. The spirit was glowing in his stomach; it was shooting spasms of life into his benumbed system. It was to her that he owed this temporary elevation from his pitiful fancies. She assumed, most suddenly, a new and surprising interest in his eyes. He considered her face and person with a curiosity almost childish. If there had been no Jenty Mandrake, he would have fallen at the feet of Mary Glasspool.

The raw spirit warmed, and thrilled, and flamed within him. It drove out the damps and the cold, and battled stoutly with weakness, hunger, and his constitutional timidity.

"You will leave one end of the bar out of the bracket?" he said, looking steadily into her dark eyes.

"Rely upon it," said Glasspool.

"It would be a dreadful, dreadful thing to deceive me!" said the journeyman. "It would be frightful if I should try the door and find it fastened. I should go mad; mad indeed!"

"I have periled my life for you," answered Mary.

"And it is for that that I yield. There is no one else as could overcome me. Mis'ress, put me where you will. If I should come out again—if the dreadful damps, if the poisonous sweat of the earth, if the penetrating cold should conquer, tell Jenty Mandrake that the watchmaker—the watchmaker as worked at a little shelf at the Three Dials—thought of her till the end was come—till the end was come and gone, and there was no more of him but a clod as they plant in the ground."

A loud shout of merriment billowed down the trap-door, making the journeyman recoil with apprehension.

Moll conducted him to the place from which she had so recently released him, and whispering words of encouragement, pushed him in and closed the door, adhering strictly to her promise not to fasten it. But Linkhorn doubted. He softly tried it, to see if it would open, and perceiving that it would, could with difficulty repress a cry of gladness.

"Tell me as you are there?" he whispered, eagerly.

"Yes; I am here."

Just then, she heard the drone of a bagpipe.

Evidently they had dragged Hutch out of his lethargy, and were forcing him to play. The notes arose like random shots at first, but presently grew wild and exhilarating. Ingulphus could pipe asleep or awake. There came a dead thumping upon the floor, which anon grew violent. The sweep and shuffle of feet; the racing and running of exuberant dancers; the leaps and ascents of uncontrollable revelers; the concerted swirl of bodies through the figures, together with the various impromptu violences and excitements of the dance, made the complaining floor shake and tremble.

"You can take the torch," said Moll. "I shall be safer without it. If any one comes to you, extinguish it."

Linkhorn thrust out his hand and received the torch with great satisfaction. It would relieve the gloom of his narrow lair, and make him feel that he yet had a hold on the world.

"Remain here quietly. If I can steal up unperceived, close the trap, and join the dancers, all may yet be well. I shall make the attempt, and if I succeed, be assured that you shall not be forgotten. My word for it, you shall see Jenty Mandrake before morning if my plan succeeds."

"And if you do not succeed?" queried Linkhorn.

"In that case, I trust you will meet her in a brighter city than London."

"I feel that it will be in heaven if anywhere," faltered the poor watchmaker, whose physical weakness make him extremely doubtful of any kind of good luck.

Glasspool groped her way to the steps and paused.

The sack and the ale were doing the business for the tatterdemalions of the Crow's Nest. A rollicking madness had gotten into their vagrant legs. Such hopping and skipping, such prancing and curveting, such bounding and pouncing, were never seen nor heard before. The shouting and tramping had reached a jolly height, when an accident occurred that changed the entire order of things. An ambitious dancer, seizing his fair partner, dashed off on a longer run than usual, and passing the given limits, rushed blindly to the open trap, adown which both disappeared with astonishing suddenness. The adventurous pair were heard bumping upon the steps, and finally in the depths below. A chorus of reckless laughter followed upon the heels of this casualty. The merry beggars were soon chattering, jibing, and asking questions, all at once, in a dense circle around the trap. The clamor aroused Bab Crowfoot, who, straightening her bent old body, popped from her chair like a cork from a bottle, demanding shrilly what was the matter. No one answering this question definitely, she cleared the rheum of sleep from her eyes with her apron, and rushed among the noisy crew.

"What ye cacklin' at, ye beggar! Have you laid a golden egg? If you have, let me see it, for it'll be the first blessin' you've brought to the Crow's Nest, you loiterin' louts! Ho, ho! Who opened this door? What business have ye with the door?"

"Curse your door!" muttered the unlucky one who had fallen with his partner, as he came limping up the steps. "Left it open a purpose, didn't ye, so somebody would break his neck."

"You're a fool," retorted Bab, "to run into a hole bigger'n a table! Hutch—Billson—some of you—bring a torch."

Billson raised his head and yawned, then went to sleep again so quick that he fairly slipped through the old woman's fingers. Hutch bestirred himself and got a torch.

"Touch it to that drowsy knave's nose!" ordered Mrs. Crowfoot. The too faithful Ingulphus obeyed, and was knocked down for his pains; and there was so much lead in him that he found it difficult to arise.

"Peradventure," said Lack, "you'll try that experiment ag'in! It's easy enough, old choppin'-block, to clap a torch to a cove's nose, ain't it? When you wants another broose to put on hexibition, make application to your wagrant. Stabs, moreover. Jabs, also. Cutlasses, notwithstanding. Swords, nevertheless!"

Mr. Billson blew up his face till it looked like the twin of an inflated bladder; while his nose resembled a cock's comb, sandwiched between two enormous cutlets of beef.

"It was a slip of the hand," said Hutch, apologetically.

"It'll be a slip o' the wind yet if you doesn't leave off such wanities," quoth the vagrant. "Hello! What's the developments? What's the hellebulloo?"

"Wake up, you poppy-head! Anybody'd think you'd took laudlelum with your supper. You might as well be a toad in the mud, as to doze away the time in this stupid fashion. Think o' one as hasn't slept for forty year."

"If you haven't slept this blessed night, I'm damned!" answered Billson, with some energy.

"It's a shame and a scandal to say so!" vociferated Bab. "Come to me at any hour o' the still watches, and you'll find me awake."

"Excuse me, but I'd rather not," said Mr. Billson.

"Where's Dick Slicer, you vicious wretch?"

"The devil carried him off about a hour ago," replied Lack, definitely. "He bolted him through the ceilin', as a hungry wagrant would bolt a apple dumplin'. He went out o' sight. He disappeared. He vanished, also."

"Back, ye cormorants!" screamed the sleepless woman. "Back to your dancin' and pipin'. Away, ye thriftless brood! What care ye save for your stomachs, and your frolickin', and your sleep. One forlorn creature has to look arter ye, as if you's so many children."

The tattered crowd fell back a little, but were too much under the influence of sack and ale to yield entire obedience to Mrs. Crowfoot. Each, from the least to the greatest, improvised some peculiar noise, from the mewing of a cat to the howling of a dog. It was a most interesting performance by the whole strength of the speckled group. Little wretches, whose uncombed hair hung nearly to their feet, joined impishly in this Tartarean chorus. Old sinners, whose wrists and ankles were calloused by companionship with the stocks, and whose way was toward Tyburn, roared and cat-called with the youngest of the unwashed and half-fledged vagabonds.

Bab snatched the torch from Hutch, and swirling it around at the full length of her shriveled arm, and diving forward her head until it was nearly at a right angle with her shoulders, glared at her irreverent and rebellious lodgers with all the fury of a malign witch.

"Beggars! thieves! knaves!" she yelled. "I see what ye've been at. I see my sack in your red eyes. Ye've robbed me, wretches! Is this the way ye pay for the shelter I give ye? Do ye bite the hand that saves ye from the law?" She plunged her torch at some of the nearest, by way of underscoring the emphatic words. One received a charred nose, another a smutch in the mouth, while a third threw out a smell of singed hair.

"Many of ye are due to the law, and ought to be paid. Due, and will be paid! Due, and will be paid soon. Due to the sure cord and the short shrift. Duz! Ha, ha! Ho, ho! Hell-brood!"

Bab stopped, with distended mouth and hurried breath; she churned her torch up and down in her right hand, clutching the air with her uplifted left. The more timid shrank from her; some were sullen, while the more hardened grinned and grimaced.

"Werry good! Werry wiacious! Give 'em another walley," said Mr. Billson, encouragingly.

Bab thrust him through with her eyes; then, with another withering glance at her vagrant family, dived down the steps with all the precipitation her limbs would allow.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CROWS OF ST. GILES.
The young woman who had fallen was sitting on the fourth step, rocking her body and wringing her hands over a fractured knee. In her haste and blindness of her rage, Mistress Crowfoot tilted against her, and shot head foremost to the bottom of the cellar, falling in a very scattered and sprawling manner.

Small misfortunes are always laughed at, and this instance of the fallibility of human legs was no exception to the rule. A thunderous peal played on the gamut of fifty varied voices, shook every stick of the Nest, and poured oil on the flame of Bab's wrath, which, being too great for expression, she contented herself by pendulating her left claw at them, and then speeding away on her errand.

"Treachery and treason!" she muttered, on reaching the door of the black-hole, and

perceiving one end of the bar out of the bracket. Hutch and Billson were at her heels. She stumbled at the door with hands quivering with doubt and fear; she flung it open. First, a blazing light flashed in her eyes, then a great meteor of fire darted into her face. She recoiled with a shriek of pain and fell backward, bewildered and astounded.

Immediately a lank and spectral figure sprang out of the crypt, bounded over the prostrate hag, upset Hutch and Billson by the force of his momentum, and ran wildly up the stairs. It was Kyte Linkhorn. His ghastly face, his sunken and staring eyes, the disorder of his person, together with his insane and startling movements, struck the beggars dumb with amazement. Had Linkhorn availed himself of the momentary panic, he might have made his way to the street, and fled from the dangers of St. Giles.

"Seize him! seize him!" screamed Crowfoot from the cellar. "Stop him—stop him, on your lives!"

Instantly a dozen knives and daggers were drawn from as many ragged hiding-places, and held ready for use. A stout fellow, by name Kilty Gracchus, placed himself before the only avenue of escape from the Nest, and scowling ferociously, made an ugly pantomime with a rusty dagger.

The watchmaker threw a terrified glance around him, and dropping his torch, fell upon his knees.

"Good people," he stammered—and not knowing what next to say, stopped, and made a new attempt: "Worthy beggars—noble beggars—kind beggars"—here his voice was drowned by hoots of derision. He essayed again: "Gentle thieves—honorable thieves—most magnanimous thieves—"

"Hang him! strangle him! choke him! cut his weasand! stop his wind! stick him like a pig! pin him to the floor! make a dried 'notomy of him! clap a plaster over his mouth!" cried twenty voices, in tones that make the watchmaker's heart sink within him. His brain swam dizzily with the vision of death. His tongue grew hot and dry. There was a taste of murder in his throat.

At that moment, to add to the horrors of his situation, Lack Billson and Ingulphus Hutch dragged, and lifted, and pushed Dick Slicer up the steps into the midst of the brandished knives and menacing faces. Bab Crowfoot hobbled after them, her face blackened and scorched by the faithful application of Linkhorn's torch. She looked like an exaggerated witch of Endor, raised from the purging fires of the nether world by infernal incantations. Her wrath had now reached a height of sublimity that lifted her far above the common modes of vituperation.

"Silence! Let every tongue of ye be silent. There's a traitor and a spy among us!" She shook her finger at Dick Slicer. This announcement was greeted with a storm of execration, hisses, and threats.

"What is the doom of informers and traitors?" demanded Bab, in her highest tones.

"Death! Death!"

The word was vociferated a hundred times.

"My doves, my ducks, my pigeons, for that answer I forgive ye the ale and the sack. For that answer, ye are my children again—my precious chickens, allers welcome to brood in the Nest. Look at this boy!"

She struck the counterfeit Dick smartly on the shoulder.

"Wot a wagabone he is!" said Billson.

"A sly 'un! a sly 'un!" observed Hutch.

"A skulkin' young hound!" growled Kilty Gracchus, edging nearer and nearer, with his dagger clutched tightly in his hand. "Who brought him here?"

"I'm the guilty warmint," answered Billson. "He perwailed on me with his wanities. A good lad enough he seemed. You, Dick Slicer, look at me! Wot do you mean? Wot kind of a go is this here?"

Moll, though in a state of dreadful anxiety, displayed great fortitude and courage. She believed it most to her advantage to tell the truth.

"I'm not a spy. I'm not an informer. I came here at first for a lark; but to-night I came with the intention of setting this poor man at liberty. You never would have been complained of or disturbed through my means. It was a needless piece of cruelty to shut up and endanger the life of this honest watchmaker. I'm sorry that I have not been successful. As for the matter of murder, I advise you to think twice before you commit

the crime. There are those who will take the trouble to inquire after Dick Slicer—those who can crush such vermin as you, as one crushes an egg-shell in his hand. Know one thing: I will die as bravely as I have lived. I will show you a trick or two before I stop breathing, that it will be worth your while to see."

Moll flung off the hand of Ingulphus Hutch, who was holding her by the arm, and retreating a few steps, placed her back against the stone masonry of the gaping fire-place where it jutted out, spanning one side of the hearth. In a twinkling, she drew two pistols from the breast of her doublet, one of which she pointed at the blackened visage of Bab Crowfoot, and the other at the jolly face of Lack Billson.

"Two of you, my coves, are ticketed to the devil. Good Bab, give the word to your beggars, and you'll be with your father in a moment."

A dead silence fell on the crows of St. Giles. Every thief of them was taken by surprise. Bab gasped and swallowed, worked her chin, and stretched her mouth. She had no wish to undertake the journey hinted at by Dick Slicer. She would have made a covert motion for the reprobates to fall on him with their weapons; but there was a bright black eye fastened on her, admonishing to prudence.

Linkhorn crawled between Moll's feet for safety.

"Here's a vexation!" said Billson, mildly. "Stand back, you wagrants. Put up your weapons and be civil. Don't you see we've lost the advantage? Speak, old woman; speak!" Bab remained obstinately silent.

Kilty Gracchus frowned, looked dissatisfied, and muttered:

"Never mind 'em, lads. He can't do for but two anyways, and them are them as we can spare. We can keep the Nest ourselves. Wot's to hinder?"

"Wot's to hinder?" said a voice at his elbow.

"I'm to hinder! Bab Crowfoot is to hinder!" hissed the sleepless woman, deeply stung by this ungrateful proposition. "My life is nothing, is it? You, too, would tear the hand that feeds ye. Thank ye, Kilty! thank ye, Kilty, that ye spoke! Keep the Crow's Nest, eh? You, you! You crawlin' beggar!"

"You're a wampyre and a wulture!" exclaimed Lack. "Can spare us, can ye? It'll be for your advantage to have us bored through the 'ead! But I ain't fond on't. I don't like it, moreover. I hate it, notwithstanding. I shrinks from it, also. Speak, old woman; speak!"

Kilty Gracchus, and three or four others, were cautiously moving forward, intending, presently, to fall upon the intrepid Dick.

"I will speak!" screamed Bab. "One as hasn't slept for forty year will speak, and to the purpose, too. We'll see who's mistress here. Dick Slicer, turn one of your pistols on Kilty Gracchus, and I swear to ye that you and the coward at your feet shall leave this place in safety."

"I'll do it," said Moll, with a firm and unfaltering voice, suiting the action to the word, "but I'll keep you under muzzle, Mistress Crowfoot. Lack Billson, take your place yonder, and your head is safe."

Moll covered Kilty's forehead with the barrel of her pistol, and held it with a poise and steadiness that was wonderful. The bullying ruffian stopped, held unequivocally at bay.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Crowfoot. "Who will keep the Crow's Nest now? I would rather have discovered such a wretch and ingrate as you, than have done for a dozen spies like this bold boy."

"Kill him! kill him!" said a few faint voices.

"Never! never!" shouted Bab. "He shall go out of my house free and unharmed. Stand back, there—stand back! Leave the door clear."

Bab waved her hand in a frenzy of assertiveness.

"Deal fairly," said Moll, "and you and your secrets are safe. Stand anybody at that end of the room. Mistress Crowfoot, I shall keep you covered till I am out of harm's way. Kyte Linkhorn, stand up like a man. Lack Billson, keep between us and those villains till we are at the head of the stairs, and my hand is on the latch of the door."

"You're a jolly 'un! I like your pluck.

Wot a 'ighwayman you'd make! I'm proud to know you. Wot a honor you'd be to the wagruncy. I've a word or two for your private ear when we meet again. Wot a smooth chin it has! Wot a eye! Kilty, you wampyre, get out the way. This here wagrunt perfects that youngster with his life."

Lack chased his cropped head and blew himself up. Kilty Gracchus slunk away, grinding his teeth and snarling, to his comrades, leaving the space clear between Moll and the stairs. Linkhorn crossed first, and Moll backed cautiously after him.

"Fear not," said Bab. "No one shall follow you."

Billson planted his short, burly figure at the foot of the stairs. Moll and Linkhorn ascended quickly, opened the door, and hurried out. Her sensations were indescribable. The fresh air met her like a welcome friend; the air that she never expected to breathe again in the streets of London; the air, cool and balmy; the air, messenger of life and liberty.

Kyte Linkhorn staggered a short distance and fell on his knees. He gasped, prayed, and wept. Moll was glad to see the tears raining down his haggard cheeks. She assisted him to arise; and leaning on her arm, he walked with weak and faltering steps. They had turned the corner of a street, and were proceeding as fast as they could, when some one came running after them. The watchmaker's fears revived; but the object of his alarm proved to be Billson.

"Put up your little guns, my jolly 'un," he said, as he came up, panting. "You won't need 'em no more to-night. We're friends, little 'un; I've said it, and by it I'll abide. I'll stick to it, likewise. I'll adhere to it, moreover. I'll die by it, also."

"You mean it, I believe?" answered Moll.

"I does. Hillo! Ticker's about to crumble down into the gutter, like a wet rag. Flicker up, old boy, flicker up! You'll live to be a lively 'un, yet, as the man said to the eel w'en he was a skinnin' him. Gi' me hole o' one o' your prongs, and I'll walk ye along jolly."

The good-natured vagrant took Linkhorn by the arm, and kept him upon his feet without much exertion.

"This has been an adventure, this has. Bless my wittles if ever I see the eekva on it! A rum 'un, Dick, a rum 'un, you be. You've a merry, winnin' way with your little guns. The man in the black and white mask couldn't done better."

Lack Billson ran on in this fashion until they reached Red Lion street.

"This advice hear," he added, with peculiar earnestness, addressing Linkhorn, when they stood at the door of the Three Dials: "Don't let the pendulum of your mouth wag too much. Let it vibrate in its own case. Never 'low your hands to p'int toward St. Giles. Never mind 'ighwaymen nor guineas, and sich vexations and wanities. In short, keep a quiet tongue in your 'ead, and it never'll be cotched in a basket as long as you live. Tell 'em as you has been a wisitin' your uncle, and was took with a complaint as floored ye. And, lastly, my precious Ticker, look arter your 'ealth. Eat a good 'eal o' wittles. Sleep a couple o' weeks. Put on a clean shirt, and may the blessin' of 'eaven attend you."

Lack braced Linkhorn carefully against the knocker, and turning to Moll, said, after two inflations of his face and two particular losses of his nose:

"Laudleum, you dog! Laudleum, you wiciousness! Laudleum, you wagabone!"

The humorous vagrant leered so knowingly that Moll could not repress a smile.

"Another insinuation. Hear! Listen! Attend, likewise! Give heed, moreover: A friend is a friend w'er you find him, and whoever he is. If a dog is your friend, it's a good thing. If a man or boy is your friend, it's a good thing. If a ooman is your friend, it's a good thing. Whomsomever and whichsomever is your friend, is a good thing. Is the dog mangy? No matter. Is the man or boy a good 'eal tattered in his weskit and other garments? No matter. Is the ooman summat worse for wear? No matter. If the whomsomever and the whichsomever is the wagrunt they calls Lack Billson, no matter, also. It's a good thing, and you're so much the luckier for't. This is wisdom. There isn't a friend that you can have, but can bark or bite, or scratch or fight, or talk for ye." Lack made a very pretty flourish in the air "Should you ever get w'rad with the wani-

ties o' the world, and elevate your mind to wagruncy, here's a jolly cove as'll adwance ye. Should you want to be a dook or a king, here's one as will set his face ag'in it. Would I be a king or a dook? Not for a day or a hour! Would I set on a throne? Not a instant! The reason for which: Because dooks, and princes, and kings, and queens, has their eads cotched in baskets. Did you ever know a wagrunt with his ead cotched in a basket? Not as you knows on. Not as I knows on. Not as nobody knows on. Did you ever know a wagrunt to die for want o' wittles? Was a crowner ever set on a wagrunt as wasn't plump and 'ealthy in his development? Did you ever know one as wasn't merry and vigorous? Not as you knows on. These things rewlve in your mind; don't let 'em go like words that wanish with the usin'. My Dick, my Slicer, *au rewoir!*" Billson looked over his shoulder as he walked away, and making a backward motion with his thumb, added in a voice most dramatic:

"Laudleum! laudleum! little 'un! *Au rewoir!*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RIDE TO HOUNSLAW.

MARGARET GURTHER, on being drawn through the secret door by Grub, found herself in total darkness.

"Come along," said the dwarf, "The passage is narrow. Put out your hands and you'll feel the wall on either side. Follow, my pretty."

Obedying his directions, Margaret groped after him.

"It's lucky to have stout arms and a good wit," continued Grub. "You see, I'm more than a match for the six-footers. It is cunning that conquers."

"Have we far to go?" asked Margaret.

"But a short distance. We shall soon be clear of the wall of the Tower."

Notwithstanding this assurance, the way seemed tediously long to the young woman. Excitement and exertion were already telling upon her strength. It was with much effort that she managed to keep pace with her tireless conductor. Although she had strong reasons for believing in the fidelity of the dwarf, a doubt occasionally disturbed her. She realized but too vividly that she was entirely at his mercy. That he was capricious, was evident. A sudden whim taking possession of his erratic brain, might destroy her hopes of liberty. Possibly, he was leading her unwary feet into some terrible pitfall. The malignity of dwarfs was proverbial.

While she was distressing herself with reflections of this character, she heard him unlock a door; and, to her joy, saw the feeble shimmer of light.

"There are three steps here," said Grub. "Don't tumble down 'em, my handsome. Perhaps you'd like my arm. Ho, ho! Wouldn't it be a rare sight to see you walking with Grub, Grub, Grub! I shall have a wife one of these days, mistress. Perhaps I shall make love to you. I'm famous at making love. What a husband for somebody! Ho, ho!"

"Don't, don't!" said Margaret, with a deprecating gesture.

"Do I make you afraid? You are not the first fair one I have made afraid. They all are afraid of Grub. Call me devil, dear!"

Margaret, descending the three steps, diverged a little to the left, then making another abrupt turn, according to the movements of her guide, reached the place from whence the light emanated. It was a large open space, with a lantern hanging in the center.

"This looks like a stable," said Margaret.

"What it looks like, it is," replied Grub.

Margaret, looking straight before her, saw three stalls and three horses. She observed that one was white, another red, and the third black as a coal. She was at once struck by the size and beauty of these animals.

"Which is the finest?" Grub asked.

"It is impossible to decide," she answered.

"Then we'll take the first that comes to hand," returned the dwarf, unfastening the white one, which was nearest. While the innkeeper's daughter looked on with curiosity, Grub saddled and bridled the steed, darting under the horse's flanks to adjust the girths, and scrambling upon his neck to put on the bridle. To all these monkey antics the horse submitted with exemplary patience. He permitted the manikin to dart between his fore-legs and his hind-legs, and commit numerous audacities that put Margaret in fear. She momentarily expected to see the noble creature lay hold of him with his mouth, or strike him dead with his iron-shod feet.

"What is his name?" she asked, hoping to divert him from his daring tricks.

"Diabolus, my dove! A sweet name, my love!" And the little imp perched between his ears, and swinging off, hung by his short legs under his neck; then, by a sharp cry, caused him to rear and stand frightfully erect. He glided over the broad chest, dropped on his back, and lay grinning under the suspended forefeet.

"You think he'll kill me, don't you? But he won't. Diabolus won't. He's a devil, and I'm a devil. Ho, ho! Down, devil, down!"

Diabolus came down gently, placing a great hoof each side of the bloated head.

"I've lived and slept with Diabolus. He'll leave his master to come at my call."

"Who is his master?"

Grub sprung up angrily, and ran menacingly toward Margaret.

"What's that to you? What do you ask questions for? Can't you be still? Can't you be a woman without having a woman's tongue? You've been thinking!"

"No, I haven't!" she protested, alarmed at his vehemence—though, truth to own, she had been thinking.

"Don't lie! don't lie to a devil. I saw the thoughts in your head. You've been putting this and that together. Don't put things together. You'd better stop putting things together!"

He shook his long arms at Margaret.

"I was a fool to do a good action. Men nor mankins never gain anything by good actions. Confess, you black-eyed witch!"

Margaret fell on her knees.

"Good Grub! kind Grub!"

He interrupted her fiercely.

"I shall have to kill you. Which way will you die? Come! you shall die easy. It's a good thing to die easy."

He caught her by the wrist, and held it so hard that she shrieked with pain.

"You don't want to die, eh? You want to live a long time, don't you? Swear, then."

"I will! I will!" gasped Margaret, totally unprepared for this dangerous mood.

"You will say nothing of the three horses—the black, the white, and the red. If you should be racked joint from joint, you'll be silent!"

"I will! I will!" responded Margaret, trembling violently.

"You are sure?"

"Don't doubt it! don't doubt it!"

"If it wasn't for that woman's tongue!" he muttered. "It would be safety to cut out that tongue. But I'll trust it for once. Down, Diabolus, down! Crumble! crumble!"

After tossing his head a moment, and making some false motions, the horse went on his knees. Grub seized Margaret by the waist, and lifted her to the saddle with astonishing quickness, then vaulted on before her, perching on the pommel like an overgrown beetle. Diabolus recovered his feet instantly. These sudden demonstrations could not but bewilder the young woman.

The horse walked a few yards through a dimly-lighted way, and stopped. The dwarf hopped to his feet, and standing on the smooth, round pommel, grasped a cord that depended from above. Pulling this cord, a large gate slowly opened. Dropping back to his seat, he rode from beneath the mysterious portal into the street.

Margaret glanced around her in extreme amazement. Behind her was the wall of the Tower, and beyond it the Tower itself, looming up in the gray of morning.

"Hold on tight!" said Grub. "Take hold of my arms. My arms are stout as iron bars. Clutch 'em fast; they won't break nor pull out at the shoulders. Diabolus is going to bolt."

With considerable reluctance, Margaret grasped the dwarf as she was bidden. The horse danced, backed, champed his bit, snorted, and sprung away up Tower street, along Eastcheap, into King William street, and thundered through Thames street, at a pace that nearly took away Margaret's breath. After that, she lost all knowledge of streets and places. She saw lights, and buildings, and squares, flying dizzily past; and, dreadfully frightened, clung to the misshapen being to whose guidance she had been so strangely committed.

The few pedestrians abroad at that early hour, paused in wonder as they swept on. Every moment she expected to be thrown from her seat and dashed to the ground. Grub chuckled and chattered in elfish glee. The rapid motion inspired him with a mad glow of delight. He kept his seat with a tenacity that was surprising.

They were soon clear of London, speeding along the highroad in the open country. Margaret begged him to stop.

"Afraid, are you, my handsome? We'll go faster, presently. Diabolus hasn't got his blood up yet. He's creeping now. What'll you say when he begins to strain his muscles? His sinews'll crack, I tell you! We'll leave a track of fire behind. A blind man might follow us by the sparks. Ho, ho! Hi, hi! What sport it is! What a devil it is, too! What a devil atop, and what a devil aeneath! Don't tumble, my dove. Clutch me tight, tight, tight!"

She felt the body of the great animal quivering under her, as he gathered himself for greater speed. Margaret grew sick and faint. The dwarf felt her arms relaxing, and stopped the bounding steed with a word and a gentle pull upon the bit. It was well he paused in his career, for Margaret would soon have lost her consciousness.

"Where are we? Where are you taking me?" she asked, in a faint voice, as soon as she was able to speak.

"You are in the open country, with Diabolus and I. We've had a merry run. We're scampering to the Barley Mow. In twenty minutes we'll be there. Was there ever such a Grub? Will there ever be another such Grub? Call me devil, dear!"

Margaret was about to remonstrate with him for his reckless riding, when the tramp of a horse was heard behind them.

The dwarf sprang upon his feet, and standing like a monkey upon the pommel, looked back anxiously. Curiosity was depicted on his face.

"Ho, ho! We're to have company, Mistress Meg; brave company, Mistress Meg. I know the step of that horse. How he measures the ground! It's the black steed, my love! It is Lucifer, my darling! There's a giant on his back. Perhaps the giant may devour you, my sweet!"

The dwarf chuckled and rambled on in his own startling fashion till the horse came foaming up.

"What in the devil's name is this?" demanded a voice that the inn-keeper's daughter recognized at once. "What mad freak are you at, you ape? Whom have you at the crupper?"

"An angel, my master. An angel in petticoats. It's a runaway match, my valiant. It's all for love, puissant. We're to be wedded at rise of sun. Ho, ho!"

"It is the inn-keeper's daughter!" exclaimed the horseman, bending toward Margaret.

"You have been my champion once within twelve hours, and I implore you to befriend me again," she instantly replied.

"You remember me, I see?" returned the horseman.

"With or without mask, I am at no loss to recognize the hero of the White and Black. I wish I could believe that the tales which are told of you were not true," answered Margaret, with a sigh.

"You may safely believe that Nightshade is no common cutpurse of the road. What he really is you may never know; yet he is better than he seems. But that question we will not discuss. You have escaped from the Tower, at which I heartily rejoice. Grub, you have done well."

"Call me an ape. Call me a bug. Call me a beetle. That will do for me; that will be enough for Grub."

He tilted himself across the horse's neck, and balanced himself in a grotesque manner.

"It matters not what one calls you," added Nightshade. "Neither praise nor blame will change your fantastic nature. Young woman, you are safe. I will escort you to the Barley Mow. It will afford you pleasure, I am sure, to learn that your cousin is, for the present, beyond the reach of Dare Cutlock."

"Thanks, sir! Your words give me new life. In

future I will disbelieve what men say of you!" cried Margaret, quite overcome with joy.

"No more tricks, Grub. Perch on your pommel, and keep by my side."

With these words, Nightshade put his steed in motion, and the parties rode toward the Barley Mow at a moderate pace.

They were proceeding in this manner, when their progress was interrupted as follows: They had reached a spot where the holly and the buckthorn formed nearly impervious hedges on both sides of the way. From these sheltering hedges three men started up. Running forward, two of them seized the bridles of the two horses, while the third advanced upon Nightshade with a cocked pistol in each hand. The appearance of this intruder was so singular that the horseman could do nothing for a moment but stare at him. The most notable thing about him, however, was a black and white mask which concealed his face. As for his apparel, it was not of a description to excite admiration either for its richness or newness.

"Stand and deliver!" he cried, at the top of his voice.

At hearing this terrible summons, Margaret screamed, as her sex warranted her in doing.

"What would you have, friend?" asked Nightshade, with composure.

"Your money or your life!" was the hoarse response.

"Who are you?" demanded the horseman, affecting considerable trepidation.

"I am Nightshade, of the White and Black!" vociferated he of the mask.

"Is it possible," said Nightshade, "that I behold that famous highwayman?"

"You see before you the masked robber of Hounds-low Heath; so deliver, or you are a dead man!"

As he pronounced these significant words, the man on the black horse observed that the pistols were shaking in his hands.

"Pardon me, good sir," quoth Nightshade, "if the terror of your presence deranges my wits somewhat, and prevents prompt compliance with your wishes. As soon as I can find my purse, you shall have it. Be satisfied with my money; do not wantonly shed my blood."

"Don't make terms with me, fellow!" exclaimed the highwayman, with increasing courage. "I will have not only your purse, but these horses; and if you do not keep a civil tongue in your head, your coat, cloak, and doublet, also."

"St. Wilfred! What a covetous wretch it is! Bear with me, dreaded highwayman; I am so distraught I can scarcely find my purse."

Grub chuckled, and Margaret looking at him, discovered that he was grinning from ear, and that one hand was thrust into his bosom.

Nightshade fumbled and groped his pockets. He withdrew his hand, and bent over the footpad, but instead of giving him any thing, grasped him by the collar, and touched his horse's flank with his spur. Lucifer shot forward like a stone hurled from an archer. The fellow at his head was dashed to the earth, while he who had audaciously impersonated Nightshade was swept from his feet, and borne away with an impetuosity that went far to unsettle his brain, and disgust him with the dangers of the road. Never did hurdle-racer run so fierce a course at the side of horse as the unlucky counterfeit. As for his weapons, he lost them he knew not how, and his breath came near going with them.

Grub, on seeing Lucifer bolt so gallantly, pulled out his large pistol, which he had been anxious to use for a long time, and discharged it at the man who stood before Diabolus; then, shouting with wild glee, rode after Nightshade, who did not slacken his speed till his victim was more dead than alive. When at length he drew up and relinquished his hold of the footpad's collar, he fell to the earth in a very weak, limp, and terrified state.

"Pitiful knave!" said Nightshade, "learn, by this lesson, never to personate your betters. The lion's skin does not make the lion. Pistols and a mask are not enough to render one terrible. Go, you paltry rascal, and be thankful that you get off so easily. Drop the name you have assumed, and never venture to appear abroad again in a black and white mask."

"Go back and pick up your pal," said Grub. "You'll find him where I left him. He won't go far, ho won't. Ho, ho! Fine pastime is this masquerading! I like it. My name is Grub, Grub, Grub! Call me devil, man; call me devil!"

With these valedictory words, the parties continued their way to the Barley Mow.

CHAPTER XXV.

HUNGERFORD—LEECHCRAFT—AJAX.

AFTER the rough treatment he had received, Dyce Hungerford could but give way to some natural expressions of anger and disappointment. When he had ventilated his feelings, he took a more philosophical view of the subject, and waited patiently further developments. At the expiration of an hour, the dungeon door was unlocked, and the colorless face of Leechcraft looked in upon him.

"My lord," he said, with his mocking smile, "I scarcely knew you. What with masquerading, what with barbarous disguises, what with intrigues and mysteries, and what with the devil knows what, my intellects are well nigh turned upside down."

"It is not to be wondered at," replied Hungerford, dryly. "You might have given me gentler treatment, however."

"How could I, my lord, without betraying you? Besides, I did not command the arquebusiers, who acted by the king's orders. Don't expect impossibilities. My duties in the Tower are limited, as you know, to a certain department; and should you ever require my humble services, be assured, my lord, that I will give you a firm hand and a steady eye."

Leechcraft's smile grew more defined and more ghastly.

"I thank you, and trust Heaven will guard me from your handiwork. Come; what can you tell me?"

"First, I should like to be informed of what your lordship is desirous of knowing?"

"Is she here?"

"There are many shes, my lord," returned Leechcraft.

"Do not provoke me! You know well whom I mean. I refer to the daughter of Primus Mallowe,

watchmaker, Clerkenwell, Red Lion street, Three Dials."

"Don't perplex me with too many details. My head is frightfully weak. Give me time to collect my thoughts."

Leechcraft paused, and pretended to reflect.

"As I wake up my sleepy memory, I do recall that two maidens were brought hither in the early part of the night. Who knows but one of these is the veritable she that you seem anxious about?"

"Unsympathizing and obstinate being! You know more than this. I see it in your malign eyes. Who brought the maidens to the Tower?"

"My Lord Hungerford Crofton, Jeffreys brought them here. You know Jeffreys. Everybody knows Jeffreys. He is an amiable creature! If you want proof that he is amiable, go and see him on the bench at the Old Bailey."

"The wretch!" exclaimed he who has thus far been known by the appellation of Dyce Hungerford, the watchmaker's apprentice. "This infamous proceeding shall be made known to the king!"

Leechcraft began to rumble down in his stomach, and kept on rumbling till he seemed on the point of losing his strength and falling upon the flags. This strange conduct greatly incensed Hungerford.

"What demon has entered your lean body now? Dare you sport with my feelings, knave? Yes, the king shall be informed of the outrage."

Leechcraft laughed more mockingly than before.

"Cease, or I'll pin you to the wall!" vociferated Hungerford, hot with rage.

"The king shall know it. He! he! Ho! ho! The king will right you. He! he! Ho! ho!"

"Raven! raven!" muttered the young man, then cooled himself by walking to and fro in one of the passages.

"Sir George Jeffreys," he said presently, "is a beast of prey. For this act, he shall account to me. Dearly, dearly shall he pay for the dastardly deed. To think of her in the power of such a miscreant! The thought drives me to the verge of madness! Where is he? Lead me to him, and I will give you such a gift as headsman never had."

"I will not lead you to him," answered Leechcraft, suddenly becoming calm again.

"Here, here! Take this. I will double the sum to-morrow."

He proffered a heavy purse to Leechcraft, who refused it with a sneer.

"Bribe those with gold who lust for it. I live by my trade. Ha! ha! By my trade! What is gold to me?—to me who cannot go out into the world to spend it? To me," he shrieked, "on whose head rests the curse of the world; I belong to the Tower, and the Tower to me. I shall eat and I shall drink while kings love to reign, ambition seeks honor, and the passions of men hurry them to destruction! I shall eat and drink while I live; and, cut off from the pulse of humanity, what more can I wish? Away with dross! Bring me the block and the axe. Ha! ha!" The peal of laughter with which he finished this outburst was discord itself.

Hungerford contemplated him with a sort of awe.

"My poor fellow," he said, presently, in a soothing voice, "you feel the curse of your trade."

"No more, no more, my lord! I want no paining pity. Compassion cannot lift me to a level with my fellow worms. I am in my tomb; I walk about in it; I eat and sleep in it; I can only leave it by stealth in the hours of darkness, and then at the risk of being torn in pieces. But I tell you, the guilt is not mine; the guilt is his who bids me strike. There—there! That subject is done. It is you who demand attention, not me. I am ready for you. You are young, and have, as yet, no curse on you. Be silent a moment."

The headsman drew forth a red handkerchief, and wiped some cold drops from his cheeks and brow, breathed hard a few seconds, then added:

"I remember where we left off. My Lord Hungerford Crofton, do you love the daughter of Primus Mallows?"

"As well as man may love maiden!"

"It's a pity. It's to be regretted, for you may get a wound by it that will never heal."

"Jeffreys shall die! I swear it!"

"Yes, he'll die; so will you; so will I. Perhaps he did not act on his own responsibility. Did that occur to you?" Leechcraft fastened his glittering eyes on Hungerford.

"It did not."

"Is Jeffreys the only bad man at court?"

"Certainly not."

"There is Arlington, Monmouth, and the king."

"True, true! But Jeffreys, being in high favor with Charles, would not pander to Arlington or Monmouth."

"Yet Jeffreys would go on his knees to do the bidding of the king."

"To what does all this tend?" asked Hungerford, uneasily.

"To this!" cried Leechcraft. "It was by the king's orders that the two maidens were abducted and brought to the Tower of London. You'll go to Charles of England for redress, will you? Ha! ha! ha!"

The headsman's eyes outglittered the rays of his torch. Hungerford stood mute with grief and amazement.

"Has—has the king—has the king seen her since she was brought to the Tower?"

He asked this with a most painful effort.

"He has," Leechcraft replied, coldly.

Hungerford groaned, and pressed his hands upon his brows.

"Your apprenticeship is ended," the headsman resumed. "Little good, you see, comes of this romantic passion. It is in vain that you have humbled yourself to the level of Primus Mallows. It is without reward that you have worn the disguise of a watchmaker's apprentice."

"In vain, indeed!" gasped the young man.

"You are not the only one who has been masquerading. I have learned from the dwarf, Grub, that you saw two cavaliers at Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"I did—I did! One of them I disarmed."

"Recall their faces and persons, my lord."

"It was in the dusk of evening, and I was too much excited to note them closely. I remember that the man whom I attacked was called Orloff by his companion. The latter, I now recollect, was of a sallow complexion, and had a scar on his face," replied Hungerford, thoughtfully.

"He of the scar was the king," said Leechcraft. "The king?" repeated Crofton, quite overpowered with surprise. "But stay! The king has no scar upon his face."

"My lord, are your wits so poor? That scar was inflicted with paint, and the sallowness came from the same cause."

"As I recall his voice and bearing, my doubts vanish. His companion was the Earl of Arlington. Alas for Margaret Gurther!"

"Do not despair, my lord. The maidens were not separated, and Lady Castlemaine was a concealed party to the king's interview with them, having previously revealed to the trembling fair ones the secret of his royalty. Her jealousy was excited. No harm came of that nocturnal visit. Lady Castlemaine, convinced of their innocence, touched by their appeals, and stimulated by her own burning jealousy, planned their escape from the Tower, but, unfortunately, confided its execution to George Jeffreys, who falsely and maliciously betrayed the trust."

"Where are they now? Every moment you give me a new hope and a new terror."

"One is in the Tower; of the other I have no knowledge."

"In Heaven's name, which? Why do you torture me?"

"Patience, my lord. All in good time. Let us be walking. You are shivering in these unhealthy damps. Come; I will show you your guide hither. I will show you Ajax. Ajax, of the Woman's Head—pander to any one who will employ him."

"Wretch!" muttered Hungerford.

The headsman moved forward so fast through the passages, that the young nobleman had difficulty in keeping pace with him. He would have asked a score of questions, but the tall and meager phantom would not pause to listen. They came to a place where the damps were more deadly, and water dripped from the walls. The floor was coated with slime, and his feet slipped on the flags.

"Tread carefully. We are approaching the pit-falls. Give me your hand."

"No, no!" said Hungerford, shivering at the touch of his cold fingers. "My footing is firm."

"Advance a little. Look down."

Leechcraft went on his knees, and thrust his link into a dark hole that looked like a well.

"What is this?" asked Crofton, gazing into the black abyss.

"The rat-pit," replied the headsman.

A moaning sound came up from the depths.

"What is that?" demanded Hungerford, in a startled tone.

"Ajax, your guide. Ajax, the lover of heads, Ajax, the crawling, fawning, lying, pimping knave."

"How came he here?"

"I cast him in, as I sometimes cast heads into a basket," said Leechcraft, moodily.

"By whose orders?"

"By the orders of one whose commands I am accustomed to obey; the Duke of Monmouth."

"The Duke of Monmouth!" echoed Crofton.

"Then he has been in these vaults to-night?"

"Help, help! Mercy, mercy!" cried a voice from the pit.

"Let him howl himself hoarse," said Leechcraft. "The water will flow into the drains anon, and force upon him a myriad of famishing rats. They'll devour him in an hour."

"Iron-hearted man! This must not be; he must be saved from such a fate. Fetch ropes—a ladder—lose no time!"

"Are you so soft-hearted?" sneered the headsman.

"Can you not suffer an enemy to perish? It was this crippled creature who betrayed the maidens to the king. The girl, Craw Kibbie, was his instrument. He confessed it to me as I dragged him along. He clung to my legs; he sued most abjectly for life. But I held him over—I dropped him in! He fell with a howl and a shriek!"

"He shall, he must be taken out! Bestir yourself, or I swear by the immortal gods that I will hurl you after him!"

"So be it, my lord—so be it," replied the headsman, sullenly. "You well know that it is not my trade to save life, but to take it. Hold the link and I will draw him up, if he has strength to grasp a rope."

Grafton took the torch. Leechcraft, going a short distance, came back with a coil of rope, which he began to uncoil and lower into the pit.

"Ho, there! How fare ye, brother?" he called.

The moaning and groaning ceased.

"The watchmaker's apprentice is here, brother. You may come up and paint Craw Kibbie and Mary Glasspole. How like ye the rat-hole?"

"Save me—save me!" gasped Ajax, in a voice husky with horror. "I hear the water dashing in the drain. The rats are coming!"

"Take the end of this rope, and cling to it like poverty to a beggar," answered Leechcraft.

"Good Leechcraft, merciful Leechcraft! Kind headsman, gentle headsman! I kiss your hands; I embrace your knees; I grovel at your feet. Life, life! sweet life!"

The headsman laughed low in his stomach.

"Hear him—hear him! Hear the pitiful plotter. He is groping for the rope. Ah, he clutches it. He won't let go, I'll warrant you. Hark! that was the squeak of a rat."

"Hurry, hurry!" cried Hungerford, shuddering.

"This is a horrible invention. Let me help you."

"No, no. My arms are thin, but the muscles are like plates of iron. See: I am fetching him."

"God be praised! I would not condemn the veriest wretch in existence to a death like this. Bransom, Bransom! how goes it with you? Be of good cheer."

The painter did not answer.

"He has dropped!" cried the young man.

"No; I have him."

The polished crown of Ajax arose from the darkness. The stiff wreath of hair below it was smutched with the filth of the pit, while his face was frightful in its ghastliness. A rat sprung from his shoulder as he came to a level with their feet.

Crofton grasped him by the arm and drew him safely to the firm earth, where he lay some time, panting and gasping. Crawling on his stomach toward Hungerford, he tried to embrace his knees, muttering half-intelligible words of gratitude and entreaty.

"Arise! And let this fearful experience improve

your life and mend your morals. You are safe, and shall safe return to your heads and your brushes, but not, I trust, to your old habits. Throw away that vaunted key, and try to realize that you are a vicious and vain old man, past the age of gallantry and intrigue, without the person to command you to woman, or the heart to command you to God."

"He'll never change, my Lord Crofton," said the headsman, harshly. "He'll go back to his rookery and his heads, to his ogling and leering, his flattering and fawning. This leopard will not change his spots for all your washing. He'll hurry to prostrate himself before the gods of his art-brother, and the rat-pit will be forgotten."

By this time Bransom had risen to his feet, and a most unpresentable object he was. Manifestly, his mind was unsettled. He talked disconnectedly of Craw Kibbie, Ruby Mallows, the Woman's Head, the Tower, and a dozen other things that had gotten inextricably mixed up in his memory.

"Now," said Crofton, "to the king. But, first, what shall we do with this fellow?"

"Let him go out as he came in. He has a key. Brother, brother, do you know where you are?"

"In the Tower," replied the painter after a moment's hesitation.

"Right, brother. Can you find your way out again—out through the long passage, across the moat to the Crushed Hat? Think, brother, think."

Ajax rubbed his palms together. A cunning twinkle appeared in his eyes.

"Long tunnel—iron door—moat—wall—Dame Wimble—pretty bar-maid—Crushed Hat—Little Tower Hill. Ho, ho!"

"Cunning still remains. I'll give you a torch, brother; and if you ever come here again, I'll add the ugliest head of all to my collection. Away to your hot-bed, and paint, cajole and spin!"

Leechcraft led on, and the bewildered artist shuffled after him. Having procured another torch, he lighted it, placed it in his hands, pointed the way, and left him to get free of the Tower as best he might.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WHICH MATTERS ARE ADJUSTED.

On the afternoon of the day following the events of the last chapter, two persons walked slowly to and fro in one of the halls of the White Tower. One was the king, the other the Earl of Arlington. The brow of Charles Stuart was somewhat clouded with anger.

"I cannot comprehend it, sire," said the earl, in answer to a remark of his majesty.

"They could not fly from the windows like birds, nor through the roof like witches. Their escape must have been aided by persons in authority in the Tower. My wishes shall not be mocked in this manner. I will speedily learn who has dared to come between me and my pleasures," said the king, frowning.

"After so much trouble, sire, this is vexatious," returned Arlington. "It is a most mortifying termination to the romantic knight-errantry of Daro Cutlock and Orloff Shillinglaw. The damsels were fair, and our plots to bring them here most ingenious. When the presumptuous meddler shall be found, I hope he will feel the weight of the royal displeasure."

Just then Grub was discovered, sitting in the embrasure of the window.

"Here is your monster, sire," added the earl.

"Why do you chuckle and leer, you ape?"

"I chuckle and leer because I know things that kings and earls don't. The six-footers know a great deal sometimes, but I can show a three-footer that knows more," replied the dwarf, raising himself by his arms and swinging after his old fashion.

"What do you know, you atom?" said Arlington. "If your knowledge is worth anything, it shall be paid for."

"Let the king speak," returned Grub. "There is more music in the king's voice than in a dozen earls. Sire, speak to your own Grub, brave Grub, faithful Grub, cunning Grub."

"There's something in that overgrown head, I think," said the king. "Have you anything to say, sirrah?"

"There is something that you want to know," returned Grub, shrewdly.

"It's an ape, an ape!" screamed Grub.

"Fore God, these should be the features of Jeffreys!" exclaimed the earl.

Jeffreys, seeing the king and Arlington, cowered back into the cell and tried to vent his shame and indignation in words; but his feelings overpowering him, he emitted only inarticulate sounds, resembling more the howl of a dog than human speech.

"What means this?" asked the king, turning sharply to Grub.

"He stole the pretty ones from the Red Chamber," replied the dwarf, his eyes dancing with malicious pleasure.

"To Sir George, then, we owe this good turn!" muttered the king, frowning.

Jeffreys shook his fist at Grub, who said:

"Call me devil, dear; call me devil!"

"It appears," said Arlington, "that my Lord Jeffreys has an eye for beauty. My liege, his conduct is most audacious."

"How happens it, Sir George, that we find you in this plight?" asked the king, sharply.

Jeffreys had choked, and struggled, and swelled with rage till he foamed at the mouth, and seemed ready to fall down in a fit of apoplexy.

"He is dying with joy, sire, at his sudden deliverance!" interposed Grub. "Ho, ho! He can't speak. But I will speak for him. He went sporting in the king's park. Ha, ha! He must needs take away with him two pretty does, and cage them in the dungeons. But he encountered a brave gentleman. There was a drawing of swords, and the fair ones took to flight. The struggle was short: my Lord Jeffreys was conquered, stripped, and thrust into this cell, where he howled himself hoarse. A pretty sight, brother Charles! See how he has scratched off his nails, and torn his flesh, and made himself frightful. Call me bug; call me beetle; call me devil!"

"Sire, sire, gasped Jeffreys, his frame quivering with excitement, "a—a—a conspiracy!"

"No doubt!" said the king, coldly.

"The—the—the throne is—is in danger! In the event of your majesty's sudden death, the Duke—" Jeffreys paused to recover his voice, and get strength to go on—"the Duke of York will be cheated of the succession. I have full proof and the names of the conspirators." He stopped again for want of breath. "The paper," he added, "in a screeching voice, "should be somewhere hereabouts."

"A miserable subterfuge!" sneered the king. "I'll hear no more of it. Sir George, you have been honored with my confidence; it is yours no longer. For last night's service I will find some fitting reward. Your toilet, my lord, should be improved. When next you betray the friendship of Charles Stuart, may you meet your deserts as promptly and summarily. Grub, lead us from these miserable dens."

"Ho! ho!" mumbled Grub. "Ho! ho! What knaves are these six-footers! They betray each other. The king betrays his subjects, they betray their king. Follow, brother. Come on through the damps and the darks."

"Above and below
I come and I go;
And none shall know
How I come and I go."

The king and Arlington walked away from the dungeons, leaving Jeffreys standing speechless and astonished.

"Let him howl! let him howl!" chuckled the dwarf. "It'll do him good to howl as he howls at the Old Bailey."

Charles Stuart traversed the subterranean aisles in silence, and reached the halls of the White Tower with a moody and thoughtful brow. He was moving slowly on when a young man, richly attired, suddenly issued from a recess, and dropping on one knee before the monarch, exclaimed:

"A boon, sire, a boon!"

"What! How is this? My Lord Crofton! Where are our guards? How gained you access, sir? What is your wish?"

"To appeal to the noble heart of my sovereign," answered Hungerford. "To throw myself upon his magnanimity."

"Arise, my lord. Seek your sovereign at the audience-chamber. He is not in gracious temper to-day," replied the king.

"Nay, sire, you do yourself injustice. Your royal heart can never be dead to the appeals of your subjects. I come to ask happiness at your hands."

Charles Stuart bit his lips and was confused.

"There's a maiden, sire that I love, and who loves me."

"The old story!" murmured the king. "I am always expected to be better than I am. A monarch, forsooth, must be generous, whether he will or no. You insinuating and fair-spoken gentlemen will coax away our crown yet. Crofton, your sovereign confesses to some shame in this matter, but he will endeavor to act more worthily in future. I have evil counselors, my friend"—he looked at Arlington archly—"wicked fellows, who haunt me night and day. If I knew where to find the maiden, I would gladly restore her to you with a dower befitting the station to which you design to raise her. Up, my lord, up! Bend not the knee to one who has done you more wrong than he is willing to own."

"Sire, you give me new life!" replied Hungerford, kissing the king's hand and rising.

"Be not too sanguine, my lord. Miss Mallows and her cousin have strangely disappeared from the Tower."

"My liege, I am assured of their safety. Miss Mallows is now under the protection of Mrs. Haselrigge, in the White Tower. I need but your royal permission to restore her to her friends."

"You have it, my lord, and she goes hence a lowered bride. I myself will attend the nuptials, and give away the bride. Not a word, my lord, not a word."

"And what of the other maiden?" asked Arlington, hesitatingly.

"Ask Grub, Grub, Grub!" cried the dwarf. "She had a ride on Diabolus. What a ride it was! You'll find Meg at the Barley Mow with Christy Kirk."

"Sire," said Arlington, "allow me to imitate your nobleness and liberality. My banker shall pass a thousand pounds to the credit of that same Margaret Gurther, which she shall receive on her wedding-day."

"Their virtue, their modesty and beauty, render them worthy of our benefactions. Now, Crofton, go away without shaming us by your gratitude; for, in good faith, you deserve this reparation at our hands. When I gave secret orders to have the watchmaker's apprentice inveigled to the Tower and cast into a dungeon, I knew not my injustice was falling upon the head of my Lord Hungerford Crofton."

"If you erred like a man, you have atoned like a king," answered Crofton, glowing with joy.

At that instant the Duke of Monmouth and Lady Castlemaine approached.

"My liege," said Lady Castlemaine, "the picture of your majesty, of which I was robbed at Hounslow, has been mysteriously restored."

"A most singular circumstance; but I can offset it by another as strange. My signet-ring, taken from me at the Barley Mow, I found, this morning, on my dressing-table," answered the king. "It seems that this highwayman is ubiquitous. Neither locks, nor bars, nor guards can keep him from where he wishes to go. This matter must be looked into."

"I am informed, sire, that a man in a white and black mask was shot last night, at Hounslow, while committing a robbery," said Lady Castlemaine.

"I have credible information," said Arlington, "that four distinct robberies were committed at four different places, last night, at about the same hour."

"Every knave in the country will take to the road in a black and white mask," said Monmouth, smiling.

"I am half inclined to believe," resumed the king, musingly, "that some one near our person, and having access to us at all times, has connived at these unaccountable robberies. I perceive that we shall have nothing but flying highwaymen, and masked knights, and cutpurses. Monmouth, see if you can not put a stop to this business. I give you carte blanche to have at these scoundrels, and work your own sweet will on them."

"You handsome villain!" whispered Lady Castlemaine to Monmouth. "What if your royal father should find out your doings?"

"I will persuade you to intercede for me," answered the duke, in the same tone.

"I never would do it! You robbed me, wild boy; but it was done sweetly, I grant. This way, your grace, out of earshot."

"Whisper not to that graceless boy!" said Charles, playfully. "I know not what you may talk of."

"But two or three words with him, my liege, after which I will return him as good as I found him; which is not promising much."

She took the duke's arm and led him to one of the windows which looked out upon the moat.

"Son of Lucy Walters and Charles Stuart, no more of your mad pranks, in Heaven's name! No more larking and plotting. No more cabals against your uncle of York. You and Leechcraft have come near being acquainted this night. Monmouth, beware of the axe! I have a terrible presentiment that you will die a violent and bloody death. Do not abuse the clemency of your royal father. Sever the dangerous bonds between you and Robert Ferguson. The connection is fraught with danger. He is drawing you rapidly toward destruction. Cut loose from those instruments that he has called around you. Spurn from you the vermin of St. Giles. Send your three horses out of the country, lest their color and singular beauty should chance to betray you."

"So, so, my lady! You know all. What varlet has dared to give you these startling details?" demanded Monmouth, pale and embarrassed.

"No matter; the knowledge came to me without falsehood to you. I know everything in connection with your plot. You have been, in some measure, the dupe of Ferguson, who has levied sums of money, under the cover of the White and Black, that you little know of. Drop forever your mask, which has caused so much consternation in city and country. Throw away your false nose and brows, and commit to the flames your suit of green. Do this, or I will inform your royal father, be the consequences what they may."

Monmouth was silent a moment. He took Lady Castlemaine's hand presently, and kissed it.

"Fair lady," he said, in a voice touched with emotion, "I obey your wishes. Nightshade of the White and Black shall be seen no more. I will also correct the abuses that have sprung up so abundantly from my reckless and thoughtless example. But my horses, madam, I cannot so easily part with. Let me beg of you to accept the white steed, Diabolus—like yourself, an incomparable creature. The dwarf, Grub, shall teach you to manage it."

"I accept your promise and gift most gratefully. Count upon me always as your friend. Should Ferguson again lead you into the vortex of treason, and that handsome head of yours be in danger, advise me of your peril, and it shall be a hard thing if I do not save you."

"Thanks, lady! I know you are all-powerful with the king. With Heaven's aid I will reform. There shall be no more larks on the highway, at least. But, lady, must not one follow his destiny? Can one resist the pressure of fate? I feel that this Ferguson is my evil demon, yet cannot shake him off."

"I will help your grace. Be of good cheer. See! your sovereign father is watching us. He is a good king, a sweet king. Look well to your head, Monmouth!"

Monmouth folded his arms and sighed. His handsome face was softened with melancholy.

"Stay a moment, my lady! I have done some good actions. The king and the earl go masquerading, sometimes."

"Dare Cutlock and Orloff Shillinglaw!" she murmured with a slight frown. "I understand."

"I came near marring their purpose of bringing those pretty ones to the Tower; and I have the satisfaction of knowing that I assisted both to escape, while at the same time I recovered important papers, and punished that yelling cur, Jeffreys. There'll be a feud between us; but luckily I am the stronger of the two. I fear him not."

"All is safe. We are friends. Let us join the king. My Lord Crofton will have a fair wife and a virtuous Monmouth, you must dance with me at the wedding."

"Right merrily," responded the duke, and they walked slowly back to the king, who was patiently waiting their coming. He eyed Monmouth sharply, struck, no doubt, by the seriousness of his expression.

"Sire," said Lady Castlemaine, "you have this day exercised the richest prerogative of power, which is to confer happiness."

Crofton placed his hand on his heart, and bowing low, said:

"My liege, both my heart and my sword are yours."

"Arlington," said Charles, presently, "I feel more like a king than I did an hour ago."

"And I, sire, feel more like a man," responded the earl.

"My royal father," said Monmouth, in an impressive voice. "I accept the commission with which you charge me. Be assured that Nightshade, of the White and Black, shall be heard of no more!"

THE END.

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